





George Saislaw.


The Hotel.

Leadburn.

West Linton.

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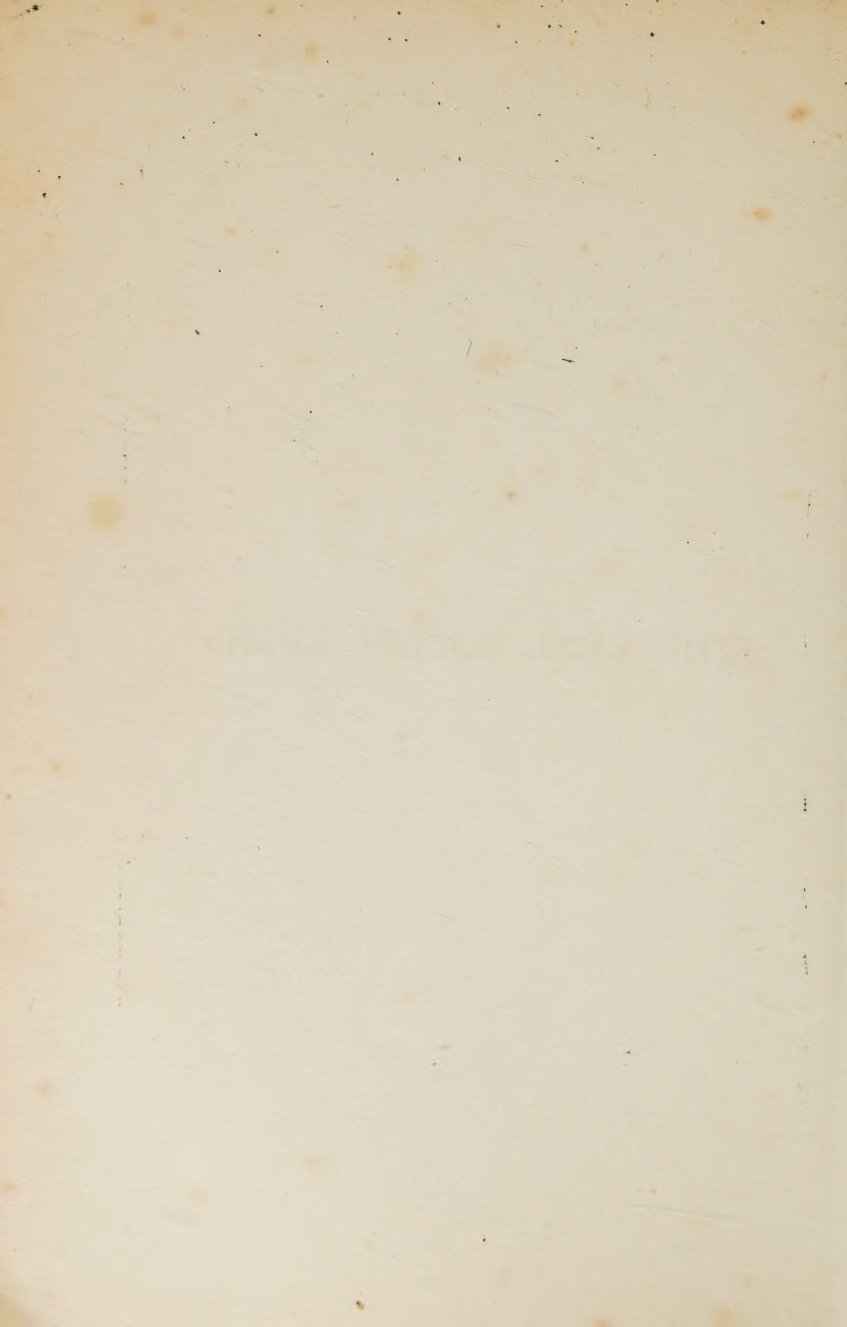




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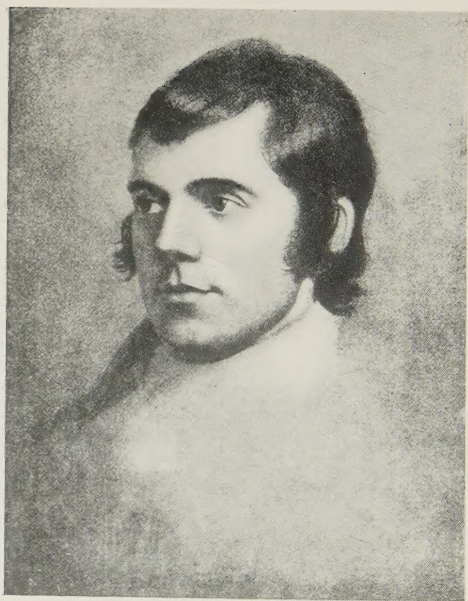


THE REAL ROBERT BURNS









ROBERT BURNS

*From Archibald Skirving's Portrait*

# THE REAL ROBERT BURNS

BY

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## FOREWORD.

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THE writer of the following pages learned years ago to reverence the memories of Burns and Dickens. Frequently hearing one or the other attacked from platform or pulpit, and believing both to be great interpreters of the highest things taught by Christ, as the basis of the development of humanity towards the Divine, he resolved that some day he would try to help the world to understand correctly the work of these two great men. His book, *Dickens as an Educator*, has helped to give a new conception of Dickens, as an educational pioneer and as a philosopher. The purpose of this book is to show that Burns was well educated, and that both in his poems and in his letters he was an unsurpassed exponent of the highest human ideals yet expressed of religion—democracy based on the value of the individual soul, brotherhood, love, and the philosophy of human life.

The writer believes that gossiping in regard to the weakness of the living is indecent and degrading, but that it is pardonable as compared with the debasing practice of gossiping about the weaknesses of the dead. Those who can wallow in the muck of degraded biographers are only a degree less wicked than the biographers themselves, who sin against the dead, and sin against the living by providing debasing matter for them to read.

The evidence to prove the positions claimed to be true in this book is mainly taken from the poems and letters of Burns himself. Some may doubt the sincerity of Burns. Carlyle had no doubt about his sincerity or his honesty. He says of the popularity



of Burns: 'The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where the English tongue is spoken, are well worth inquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works. What is that excellence? To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or in prose, but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised—*his sincerity, his indisputable air of truth.*'

Speaking of the moral character of Burns, Carlyle said: 'We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay, from doubting that *he is less guilty than one of ten thousand.* . . . What he *did* under such circumstances, and what he *forbore to do*, alike fill us with astonishment at the *natural strength and worth of his character.*'

Shakespeare says in *Hamlet*: 'Ay, sir, to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.' Carlyle chose Burns as one of ten thousand.

These quotations should help two classes of men: the 'unco guid,' who believe evil stories, most of which had no real foundation; and those professed lovers of Burns who love him for his weaknesses. The real Robert Burns was not weak enough to suit either of these two classes. 'Less guilty than one in ten thousand' is a high standard.

To do something to help all men and women to a juster understanding of the real Robert Burns is the aim of the writer. Let us learn, and ever remember, that he was a reverent writer about religion, a clear interpreter of Christ's teaching of democracy and brotherhood, a profound philosopher, and the author of the purest love-songs ever written.

# THE REAL ROBERT BURNS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE TRUE VALUES OF BIOGRAPHY.

A MAN'S biography should relate the story of his development in power, and his achievements for his fellow-men. Biography can justify itself only in two ways: by revealing the agencies and experiences that formed a man's character and aided in the growth of his highest powers; and by relating the things he achieved for humanity, and the processes by which he achieved them.

Only the good in the lives of great men should be recorded in biographies. To relate the evil men do, or describe their weaknesses, is not only objectionable, it is in every way execrable. It degrades those who write it and those who read it. Biography should not be mainly a story; it should be a revelation, not of evil, but of good. It should unfold and impress the value of the visions of the great man whose biography is being written,

and his success in revealing his high visions to his fellow-men. It should tell the things he achieved or produced to make the world better; the things that aid in the growth of humanity towards the divine. The biographer who tells of evils is, from thoughtlessness or malevolence, a mischievous enemy of mankind.

No man's memory was ever more unjustly dealt with than the memory of Robert Burns. His first editor published many poems that Burns said on his death-bed should be allowed 'to sink into oblivion,' and told all of weakness that he could learn in order that he might be regarded as just. He considered justice to himself of more consequence than justice to Burns, or to humanity. His only claim to be remembered is the fact that he prepared the poems of Burns for publication, and wrote his biography. It is much to be regretted that he had not higher ideals of what a biography should be, not merely for the memory of the man about whom it is written, but for its influence in enlightening and uplifting those who read it. Biographers should reveal not weaknesses, but the things achieved for God and humanity.

Carlyle, writing of the biographers of Burns, says: 'His former biographers have done



something, no doubt, but by no means a great deal, to assist us. Dr Currie and Mr Walker, the principal of these writers, have both, we think, mistaken one important thing: their own and the world's true relation to the author, and the style in which it became such men to think and to speak of such a man. Dr Currie loved the poet truly, more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself; yet he everywhere introduces him with a certain patronising, apologetic air, as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar and a gentleman, should do such honour to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith; and regret that the first and kindest of all our poet's biographers should not have seen farther, or believed more boldly what he saw. Mr Walker offends more deeply in the same kind, and both err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his attributes, virtues, and vices, *instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity.*

The biographers of Robert Burns criticised reputed defects of his—defects common among men of all classes and all professions in his time—but failed to give him credit for

his revelations of divine wisdom. They be-moaned his lack of religion—though he was a reverently religious man—instead of telling the simple truth that he was the greatest religious reformer of his time in any part of the world. They said he was not a Christian because he did not perform certain ceremonies required by the churches, when freer and less bigoted men would have told the real fact, that he was one of the world's greatest interpreters of Christ's highest ideals—democracy and brotherhood. He still holds that high rank. They related idle gossip about his vanity and other trivial stories, instead of being content with proclaiming him the greatest genius of his time in the comprehensiveness of his visions, and in the scope of his powers. Some of them tried to prove that he was not a loyal man; they should have revealed him as the giant leader of men in making them conscious of the value of liberty and of the right of every man to its fullest enjoyment.

The oft-repeated charge of disloyalty was disproved when the charge was made during the life of Burns, but the false accusation has been accepted as a fact by many people to the present time. Fortunately the records of the Dumfries Volunteers have been discovered

recently, and Mr William Will has published them in a book entitled *Robert Burns as a Volunteer*. They prove most conclusively that Burns was a truly loyal man. When the Provost of Dumfries called a meeting of the citizens of Dumfries to consider the need of establishing a company of Volunteers Burns attended the meeting, and was chosen as a member of a small committee to write to the king asking permission to form a company. When permission was granted by the king, Burns joined the company on the night when it was first organised, and sat up most of the night composing 'The Dumfries Volunteers,' the most inspiring poem of its kind ever written. It did more to arouse the people of Scotland and England to put down the bolshevism of the time than any other loyal propaganda.

The minutes of the Volunteer Company in Dumfries give a perfect answer to the basest slander ever made against Burns—that he had sunk so low as a hopelessly vile drunkard the respectable people of Dumfries would not associate with him; that he was ostracised by the community at large. Yet this 'ostracised man' was chosen by the best citizens of Dumfries as one of the committee to write to King George, and was elected as a member

of the committee to manage the company. This slander was so generally accepted in Carlyle's time that even Carlyle himself wrote that Burns did not die too soon, as he had lost the respect of his fellow-men, and had lost also the power to write. His first statement is proved to have no true foundation by the record of the Dumfries Volunteer Company, and the second by the fact that Burns wrote the greatest poem ever written by any man to interpret Christ's highest visions, democracy and brotherhood, 'A Man's a Man for a That,' the year before he died, and 'The Dumfries Volunteers.' The second year before his death he wrote 'The Tree of Liberty' and 'The Ode to Liberty,' and the third year before he died he wrote the clarion call to fight in defence of freedom, 'Scots, wha hae.' These poems have no equals in any literature of their kind. During the same three years of his life he wrote one hundred and seventeen other fine songs and sent them to Edinburgh for publication, the last one on the ninth day before his death. It should be remembered, too, that Burns had to ride two hundred miles each week in the discharge of his duty to the government; and that after the organisation of the Volunteer Company he had to drill four hours each week, and

attend the meetings of the company committee. The minutes of the company show he was never fined for absence.

The last meeting he attended before his fatal illness was called to prepare a letter of gratitude to God for preserving the life of the king when the London bolshevistic mob tried to kill him on his way to the House of Commons. Assisting to prepare this letter to the king was the last public act of Burns.

Had his weaknesses been tenfold what they were, his biographers should have said nothing about them, for in spite of his human weakness he had divine power to reveal to all men Christ's teachings—democracy and brotherhood, based on the value of the individual soul. He was also the greatest poet of religion, ethics, and love; and he holds a high place among the loving interpreters of Nature.

To relate facts in his life to account for the development of his powers, so that he was able to be so great a revealer of the highest things in the lives of men and women, should have been the work of his biographers.

It is worthy of note that Wordsworth wrote to the publishers of the biography of Burns in regard to the true attitude of a biographer. He objected to recording imputed failings, and expressed indignation at



Dr Currie for devoting so much attention to the infirmities of Burns.

Chambers and Douglas were in most respects better than his other early biographers. The Rev. Lauchlan MacLean Watt, of Edinburgh, wrote for the Nation's Library in 1914 the sanest, truest book yet written about Burns.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES OF BURNS.

MANY people still speak of Burns as an 'uneducated man.' Although a farmer, he was in reality a well-educated man. He was not a finished scholar in the accepted sense of the universities, but both in his poetry and in his unusually forceful and polished prose he was superior to most of the university men of his time. He had read many books, the best books that his intelligent father could buy, or that he could borrow from friends or from libraries. In addition to school-books, he names the following among those books read in his youth and young manhood — *The Spectator*, Pope's Works, Shakespeare, Works on Agriculture, *The Pantheon*, Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Justice's *British Gardener*, Boyle Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Doctor Taylor's *Doctrine of Original Sin*, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, Hervey's *Meditations*, Thomson's Works, Shenstone's Works, *The Letters by the Wits of Queen Anne's Reign*,

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, Macpherson's *Ossian*, two volumes of *Pamela*, and one novel by Smollett, *Ferdinand*, *Count Fathom*. In addition to these he had read some French and some Latin books, guided by one of the greatest teachers of his time, John Murdoch, who was so great that when he established a private school in London his fame spread to France, and some leading young men, notably Talleyrand, came to receive his training and inspiration.

William Burns read regularly at night to his two sons, Robert and Gilbert, and after the reading the three fellow-students discussed the matter that had been read, each from his own individual standpoint. As the boys grew older they read books during their meals, so earnest were they in their desire to become acquainted with the best thought of the world's leaders, so far as it was available. David Sillar has stated that Robert generally carried a book with him when he was alone, that he might read and think. When Robert settled at Ellisland he aroused an interest among the people of the district, and succeeded in establishing a circulating library.

His father, though a labourer, was supremely desirous that his family should be educated

and thoughtful. This desire prompted him to become a farmer, that he might keep his family at home. He was an independent thinker himself, and by example and experience he trained his sons to love reading and to think independently. Robert never thought he was thinking when he let other people's thoughts run through his mind.

The result of the reading and thinking which their father led Robert and Gilbert to do was most gratifying. The influence on Robert's mind must be recognised. He became not only a great writer in prose and in poetry, but a great orator as well. He stood modestly, but conscious of his power, and proved his superiority both in conversation and impromptu oratory to the leading university men of his time in Edinburgh. Gilbert, too, became an original thinker and a writer of clear and forceful English. In a long letter to Dr Currie he discussed very profoundly and very independently some deep psychological ideas in excellent language. Few men of his time could have written more thoughtfully or more definitely. As illustrations of Robert's learning, as well as of his independent thought in relating the books he read to each other and to human life, two instances are worth recording. First, in a

letter to Dr Moore,\* of London, an author of some distinction, who had sent him a copy of one of his books, Burns said, 1790: ‘ You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of your work, which so flattered me that nothing less would serve my overweening fancy than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett in your different qualities and merits as novel writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear, but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shows in the Book of Job—“ And I said, I will also declare my opinion.” ’

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote, 1788: ‘ Dryden’s *Virgil* has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the *Georgics* are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me, and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation. . . . I own I am disappointed in the *Æneid*. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the letter critic; but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do

\* Dr Moore was the father of Sir John Moore, the British general who was killed at Corunna in the Peninsular War.

not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say that I think Virgil, in many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the *Odyssey* by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is anything of this owing to the translators; for from everything I have seen of Dryden, I think him in genius and fluency of language Pope's Master.'

But a small percentage of university graduates of his time could have written independent criticisms, wise or otherwise, of Homer and Virgil, or even of English writers, as clearly as Burns did. They could have told what the opinions of other people were in regard to Homer and Virgil; they could have told what they had been told. Burns had been trained to think by his father, and to express his own thoughts about the books he read; they had merely been informed. The advantage in real education was greatly in favour of Burns. Their memories had been stored with opinions of others; his mind had been trained to read carefully, to relate the thoughts of others to life, to decide as to their wisdom, and to think independently himself. His education from books was somewhat



limited, but the development of his mind that came from discussions of the value of the matter read was vital, and helped him to relate himself to men, to nature around him, to the universe, and to God.

In schools Burns had not a very extended experience. When six years old he was sent to a small school beside the mill on the Doon at Alloway. His teacher gave up the school soon after Burns began to attend it. Mr Burns secured the co-operation of several of his neighbours, and they engaged a young man named Murdoch to teach their children, agreeing to take him in turn as their guest, and to pay him a small salary. The fact that John Murdoch formed a high estimate of Mr Burns is a proof of the ability and sincerity of the father of the poet.

When Burns was seven years old his father removed to Mount Oliphant farm, but Robert continued to attend the school of Mr Murdoch, about two miles away, in Alloway. The books used were a spelling-book, the New Testament, the Bible, Mason's *Collection of Prose and Verse*, and Fisher's *English Grammar*.

Mr Murdoch gave up his Alloway school when Burns was nine years old. After that time the teacher of his sons was their father.

He taught them arithmetic, and bought them Salmon's *Geographical Grammar*, Derham's *Physico- and Astro-Theology*, Ray's *Wisdom of God in the Creation*, and the *History of the Reigns of James I. and Charles I. of England*. Robert, when eleven years old, showed a deep interest in the study of grammar and language, and 'excelled as a critic in substantives, verbs, and participles.' In his twelfth year he was kindled in his patriotic spirit by the *Life of Sir William Wallace*. Wallace remained a hero to him throughout his life. In his thirty-fifth year he wrote the grandest call to the defence of liberty ever written, beginning :

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled.

In his eleventh year, which seemed to be a kindling epoch in his mind, his mother's brother gave him a collection of *Letters by the Wits of Queen Anne's Reign*. He read them over and over again, greatly delighted by both their contents and their literary style. They had a distinct influence in forming his own prose style, as during his twelfth year he conducted an imaginary correspondence of quite an extensive character and in a stately style.

When he was thirteen the greatest kindler of his early powers, John Murdoch, became

teacher of English in the Ayr High School. Robert was sent to board with him to study grammar and composition. He received instruction from Murdoch in French and in Latin. He continued the study of French in the evenings at home, as he had obtained a French dictionary and a French grammar.

His formal education, so far as it became an element in the cultivation of his mind and the development of his supreme powers, ended with the few weeks spent with John Murdoch in Ayr. They were epoch weeks to Burns; transforming weeks, because of the increased range of his learning, but made infinitely more richly transforming by the revelation of new visions of life, and by the culture gained by association with a man of rare ability and supreme kindling power, such as John Murdoch undoubtedly possessed. A genius like Burns, living with a great teacher like Murdoch, could in a month get many of the new revelations, the new visions, and the strong impulses that should come into a growing soul as the result of a university course.

Burns, in his seventeenth year, was sent to Kirkoswald to study mensuration and surveying. He intended to become a surveyor. Peggy Thomson lived next door to the school he attended. He met Peggy, loved

her madly, and found it impossible to study longer. He afterwards wrote two beautiful poems to her. His school life for a brief period in Kirkoswald had little influence in the development of his power, except for the organisation of a debating society composed of a companion, William Niven, and himself. They met weekly to hold debates, and these debates were greatly enjoyed by Burns. His practice in debating societies afterwards organised by him in Tarbolton and in Mauchline not only developed in him his unusual oratorical ability, but at the same time gave him mental training of vital importance. Impromptu speaking surpasses any other known educational process in developing the human mind. However, Burns could neither study for Hugh Rodger nor debate with William Niven after he fell in love with Peggy Thomson, so, after a sleepless week, he went home.

Some may wonder, when they learn that for a time Burns took more interest in studying Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* than in any other department of study in his home under his father's guidance. When the Rev. Archibald Alison sent him his book, *Essays on the Principles of Taste*, Burns thanked him, and in his letter said: 'In short, sir,

except Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas, as your *Essays on the Principles of Taste*.'

Burns evidently studied geometry at the time his mind was ripe for new development by that special study. All children and young people would be fortunate if they could be guided to the special study capable of arousing their deepest interest, and therefore capable of promoting their highest development, at the special period of their mental growth when that particular study will awaken their deepest and most productive interest.

Robert's mind appears to have had a splendid power of adaptation to the books and studies which his father secured for his sons. Gilbert says: 'Robert read all these with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled; and no book was so voluminous as to slacken his industry, or so antiquated as to damp his researches.' Dr Moore wrote to Burns in 1787: 'I know very well you have a mind capable of attaining knowledge by a shorter process than is commonly used, and I am

certain you are capable of making better use of it, when attained, than is generally done.'

This makes it easier to understand why Burns had a mind so well stored with so many kinds of knowledge; and knowledge classified by himself, and related to life, so well that he could use it readily when he required to do so. The university men in Edinburgh marvelled more at the vastness of his stores of different kinds of knowledge, when he met them with dignified calmness, than they did because of his wonderful gifts of poetic genius. Douglas says of Burns in Edinburgh: 'Burns did not fail to mix by times with the eminent men of letters and philosophy, who then shed lustre on the name of Scotland.'

Lockhart wrote: 'Burns's poetry might have procured him access to these circles; but it was the extraordinary resources he displayed in conversation, the strong sagacity of his observations on life and manners, the splendour of his wit, and the glowing energy of his eloquence, that made him the serious object of admiration among these practised masters of the arts of talk. Even the stateliest of these philosophers had enough to do to maintain the attitude of equality when brought into contact with Burns's gigantic



understanding ; and every one of them whose impressions on the subject have been recorded agrees in pronouncing his conversation to have been the most remarkable thing about him.'

Speaking of this, Chambers properly says : ' We are thus left to understand that the best of Burns has not been, and was not of a nature to be, transmitted to posterity.' Why was Burns, though a ploughman, able to meet a galaxy of leaders in different spheres of learning, and culture, and philosophy, and outshine any of them in his own special department? The answer is simple. He had two great teachers to kindle him and guide him in the development of his remarkable natural powers : his father, William Burns, and his teacher and friend, John Murdoch.

His father made it certain that he would possess a wide range of knowledge of the best available books on religious, ethical, and philosophical subjects—philosophy of science and philosophy of the mind ; and, better than that, he trained him definitely by nightly practice to digest, and expound, and relate, and even dare to disbelieve, the opinions expressed in the books he read. In nightly discussions with his father and Gilbert his mind became keen and broad, and he became self-reliant.

He had not merely stored knowledge in his mind, he had wrought the knowledge into his being, as an element of his growing power. Like great players of chess who sometimes meet several opposing players of eminence at the same time and vanquish them all at one period of play, Burns could meet the leaders of many departments of progress, culture, and philosophy at the same time, and stand calm and serene in glory with each leader on the crest of his own special mountain of knowledge.

From John Murdoch he received the inspiration of a vital comradeship, a fine training in English language—grammar, and a good introduction to literature—and visions of higher relationships to his fellow-men and to God.

However, great as Murdoch was as a kindler and a teacher, the education of Robert Burns was mainly due to his remarkable father. Alexander Smith, in his memoir of Burns, which Douglas claimed to be 'the finest biography of its extent ever written,' speaking of William Burns, says: 'In his whole mental build and training he was superior to the people by whom he was surrounded. He had forefathers he could look back to; he had family traditions which he

kept sacred. Hard-headed, industrious, religious, somewhat austere, he ruled his house with a despotism which affection and respect on the part of the ruled made light and easy. To the blood of the Burnsese a love of knowledge was native, as valour in the old times was native to the blood of the Douglasses.'

John Murdoch wrote of William Burns: 'Although I cannot do justice to the character of this worthy man, yet you will perceive from what I have written *what kind of person had the principal part in the education of the poet.* He spoke the English language with more propriety, both with respect to diction and pronunciation, than any man I ever knew with no greater advantages; this had a very good effect on the boys, who talk and reason like men much sooner than their neighbours.'

These two quotations help us to understand William Burns as a great teacher of his sons, and his daughters, too, although he did not deem it quite so important to educate his daughters as his sons. It is perfectly clear that the paternal despotism spoken of by Mr Smith, which indeed was supposed to be necessary one hundred and fifty years ago, was not the reason why his boys so early talked and reasoned like men. William

Burns was the elderly friend of his sons, not a despot, when he trained them to love reading, and much better to speak freely their individual opinions about what they read. This naturally led his sons to speak like men early and fearlessly. Despotism on the part of the father would have had directly the opposite effect.

Gilbert Burns sums up his father's estimate of early education and good training when he says: 'My father laboured hard, and lived with the most rigid economy, that he might be able to keep his children at home, thereby having an opportunity of watching the progress of our young minds and forming in them early habits of piety and virtue; and from this motive alone did he engage in farming, the source of all his difficulties and distresses.'

Robert, after his father's death, wrote to his cousin, and said his father was 'the best of friends, and the ablest of instructors.'

In the sketch of his life sent to Dr Moore, of London, he wrote: 'My father, after many years of wanderings and sojournings, picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my pretensions to wisdom.'

An important element in the education of

Burns was his love of Nature. His mind was specially susceptible to development by Nature in any of its forms of beauty or of majesty. A friend who was his guide through the grounds of Athole House, when he was making his tour through the Highlands, in a letter to Mr Alex. Cunningham, wrote: 'I had often, like others, experienced the pleasures which arise from the sublime or elegant landscape, but I never saw those feelings so intense as in Burns.'

Burns was born and spent his early life and young manhood in a district whose beauty has few equals anywhere. Its rivers—Ayr, Doon, Afton, Lugar, Fail, and Cessnock; all, except Afton, within easy walking distance of his homes in Ayrshire—with their beautifully wooded banks, were, in a very definite way, transforming agencies in the growth of his mind, and therefore most important elements in his highest education. The 'winding Nith,' which flowed within a few yards of the home he built on Ellisland farm, around the promontory on which stand the ruins of Lincluden Abbey, and on through Dumfries, continued during the last few years of his life the educational work of the rivers of his native Ayrshire.

The mind of Burns was brought into unity

with spiritual ideals through the influence of Nature more productively than by any other agency. He walked in the gloaming, according to his own statement, by the riverside or in woodland paths when he was composing his poems. While residing in Dumfries he had a favourite walk up the Nith to Lincluden Abbey, amid whose ruins he sat in the gloaming, and on moonlight nights often till midnight, recording the visions that came to him in that sacred environment of wooded river and linn (waterfall).

There was much similarity between the most vital educational development of Burns and of Mrs Browning. In *Aurora Leigh*, the record of her own growth, she describes her true education, although not her actual life's history. Aurora loses her mother in her fifth year, and lives with her father for nine great years near Florence ; she says :

So nine full years our days were hid with God  
Among His mountains. I was just thirteen,  
Still growing like a plant from unseen roots  
In tongue-tied springs ; and suddenly awoke  
To full life, and life's needs and agonies,  
With an intense, strong, struggling heart beside  
A stone-dead father. Life struck sharp on death  
Makes awful lightning.

Her years till thirteen are spent mainly in



her father's fine library reading what she most loved of the treasures of the world. Her own statement of her father's educational guidance is :

My father taught me what he had learnt the best  
Before he died, and left me—grief and love ;  
And seeing we had books among the hills,  
Strong words of counselling souls, confederate  
With vocal pines and waters, out of books  
He taught me all the ignorance of men,  
And how God laughs in heaven when any man  
Says, ' Here I 'm learned ; this I understand ;  
In that I 'm never caught at fault or doubt.'

Like Burns she reads good books with joyous interest ; like Burns she has a father deeply interested in her education who teaches her vital things ; and like Burns she loves to learn from the ' vocal pines and waters,' and finds her richest revelations for her mind ' with God among His mountains.'

The hills of Ayrshire, the rivers, and the river-glens, whose sides are covered with beautiful trees, were to Burns kindlers of high ideals, and revealers of God.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BURNS.

HE was a truly independent democrat. The love of liberty was the basic element of his character. His fundamental philosophy he expressed in the unanswered and unanswerable questions :

Why should ae man better fare,  
And a' men brothers ?

*Epistle to Dr Blacklock.*

If I'm designed yon lordling's slave,  
By Nature's law designed,  
Why was an independent wish  
E'er planted in my mind ?

*Man was Made to Mourn.*

To the Right Hon. John Francis Erskine he wrote: 'The partiality of my countrymen has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the Poet I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I trust will be found in the Man.'

Referring to the fact that his father's family rented land from the 'famous, noble Keiths,' and had the honour of sharing their fate—their estates were forfeited because they took

part in the rebellion of 1715—he says: ‘Those who dare welcome Ruin and shake hands with Infamy, for what they believe sincerely to be the cause of their God and their King, are—as Mark Antony in Shakespeare says of Brutus and Cassius—“Honourable men.”’

Though his father was not born in 1715, he undoubtedly got from his family the principles of independence and the love of liberty which he afterwards taught to his sons, and which Robert propagated with so much zeal.

In a letter to Mrs Dunlop he wrote: ‘Light be the turf upon his breast who taught, “Reverence thyself.”’

To Lord Glencairn, after expressing his gratitude, he said: ‘My gratitude is not selfish design—that I disdain; it is not dodging after the heel of greatness—that is an offering you disdain. It is a feeling of the same kind with my devotion.’

In many of his letters he expresses the same sentiments. In his Epistle to his young friend, Andrew Aiken, he advises him, among other things,

To gather gear by every wile  
That’s justified by honor;  
Not for to hide it in a hedge,  
Nor for a train attendant;  
But for the glorious privilege  
Of being independent.

In a letter to Mr William Dunbar, dealing with his consciousness of his responsibility for his children, he wrote, 1790: 'I know the value of independence; and since I cannot give my sons an independent fortune, I shall give them an independent line of life.'

Writing to Mrs Dunlop about his son—her god-son—Burns said: 'I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of the head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.'

In 'A Man's a Man for a' That' he says:

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd 'a lord,'  
 Wha struts, and stares, and a' that;  
 Tho' hundreds worship at his word,  
 He's but a coof for a' that. blockhead  
 For a' that, and a' that,  
 His ribband, star, and a' that,  
 The man o' independent mind  
 He looks and laughs at a' that.

In the same great poem he crystallises a fundamental truth in the immortal couplet:

The rank is but the guinea stamp,  
 The man's the gowd for a' that. gold

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote in 1787: 'I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness.'

To Mrs M'Lehose he wrote in 1788: 'The dignifying and dignified consciousness of an honest man, and the well-grounded trust in approving heaven, are two most substantial foundations of happiness.'

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote in 1788: 'Two of my adored household gods are independence of spirit and integrity of soul.'

To Mrs Graham he wrote in 1791: 'May my failings ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind.'

To John Francis Erskine he wrote in 1793: 'My independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue.'

In the 'Vision' the message he says he received from Coila, the genius of Kyle, the part of Ayrshire in which he was born, was:

Preserve the dignity of Man, with soul erect.

Burns has been criticised for meddling with what his critics called politics. The highest messages Christ gave to the world were the value of the individual soul, and brotherhood based on the unity of developed individual souls. His highest messages were understood by Burns more clearly than by any one else during his time, and Burns was too great a man to be untrue to his greatest visions. His poems are still among the best interpretations

of Christ's ideals of democracy and brotherhood.

The supreme aim of Burns was to secure for all men and women freedom from the unnatural restrictions of class or custom, so that each individual might have equal opportunity for the development of his highest element of power, his individuality, or self-hood—really the image of God in each. God gave him the vision of the ideal: 'Why should ae man better fare, and a' men brothers?' and he tried to reveal the great vision to the world to kindle the hearts of men.

Burns was a devoted son, and a loving, considerate, respectful, and generous brother. After his father died, Robert wrote to his cousin: 'On the 13th current I lost the best of fathers. Though, to be sure, we have had long warning of the impending stroke, still the feelings of nature claim their part, and I cannot recollect the tender endearments and paternal lessons of the best of friends and the ablest of instructors without feeling what, perhaps, the calmer dictates of reason would partly condemn.

'I hope my father's friends in your country will not let their connection in this place die with him. For my part, I shall ever with pleasure—with pride—acknowledge my con-



nection with those who were allied by the ties of blood and friendship to a man whose memory I shall ever honour and revere.'

On the stone above his father's grave in Alloway Kirkyard are engraved the words Burns wrote as his father's epitaph :

O ye, whose cheek the tear of pity stains,  
 Draw near with pious reverence and attend !  
 Here lies the loving husband's dear remains,  
 The tender father, and the gen'rous friend ;  
 The pitying heart that felt for human woe ;  
 The dauntless heart that feared no human pride ;  
 The friend of man—to vice alone a foe ;  
 For ev'n his failings leaned to virtue's side.

John Murdoch warmly approved of this epitaph of his former pupil and friend Robert. He wrote : ' I have often wished, for the good of mankind, that it were as customary to honour and perpetuate the memory of those who excel in moral rectitude, as it is to extol what are called heroic actions.'

When Burns found that the Edinburgh edition of his poems had brought him about five hundred pounds, he loaned Gilbert one hundred and fifty pounds to assist him to get out of debt, in order that his mother and sisters might be placed in a position of security and greater happiness. In a letter to Robert Graham of Fintry, explaining the

circumstances that led him to accept the position of an exciseman, he first explains that Ellisland farm, which he rented, was in the last stage of worn-out poverty when he got possession of it, and that it would take some time before it would pay the rent. Then he says: 'I might have had cash to supply the deficiencies of these hungry years; but I have a younger brother and three sisters on a farm in Ayrshire, and it took all my surplus over what I thought necessary for my farming capital to save not only the comfort, but the very existence, of that fireside circle from impending destruction.'

He helped with sympathy, advice, and material support a younger brother who lived in England. His true attitude towards his own wife and family is shown in his 'Epistle to Dr Blacklock':

To make a happy fireside clime  
For weans and wife,  
Is the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life.

The greatest dread of his later years was that he might not be able to provide for his family in case of his death.

Burns was an upright, honest man. To the mother of the Earl of Glencairn he wrote: 'I would much rather have it said

that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession.'

To James Hamilton, of Glasgow, he wrote: 'Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I have ever laid it down as my foundation of comfort—that he who has lived the life of an honest man has by no means lived in vain.'

To Sir John Whitefoord he wrote in 1787: 'Reverence to God and integrity to my fellow-creatures I hope I shall ever preserve.'

In a letter to John M'Murdo in 1793 he wrote: 'To no man, whatever his station in life, have I ever paid a compliment at the expense of truth.'

In 'Lines written in Friar's Carse' he wrote:

Keep the name of Man in mind,  
And dishonour not your kind.

To Robert Ainslie he wrote: 'It is much to be a great character as a lawyer, but beyond comparison more to be a great character as a man.'

To Andrew Aiken, in his 'Epistle to a Young Friend,' he wrote:

Where you feel your honour grip,  
Let that aye be your border.

In 'A Man's a Man for a' That' he expresses

his faith in righteousness as a fundamental element in character, where he says :

The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,  
Is king o' men for a' that.

Burns had a sympathetic heart that overflowed with kindness for his fellow-men, and even for animals, domestic and wild. In a letter to the Rev. G. H. Baird in 1791 he said: 'I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.'

It was the big heart of Burns that directed the writing of the first part of that sentence, and his modesty that led to the expression of the second part. The joy of remembering a good deed was never his chief reason for doing it. In a 'Tragic Fragment' he wrote :

With sincere though unavailing sighs  
I view the helpless children of distress.

A number of stories have been preserved to prove that while Burns was strict and stern in dealing with smugglers, and others who made a practice of breaking the law by illegally selling strong drink without licence, he was tenderly kind and protective to poor women who had little stores of refreshments to sell to their friends on fair and market days.

Professor Gillespie related that he overheard Burns say to a poor woman of Thornhill one fair-day as she stood at her door: 'Kate, are you mad? Don't you know that the Supervisor and I will be in upon you in the course of forty minutes? Good-bye t'ye at present.'

His friendly hint saved a poor widow from a heavy fine of several pounds, while the annual loss to the revenue would be only a few shillings.

He was ordered to look into the case of another old woman, suspected of selling home-brewed ale without licence. When she knew his errand she said: 'Mercy on us! are ye an exciseman? God help me, man! Ye'll surely no inform on a puir auld body like me, as I hae nae other means o' leevin' than sellin' my drap o' home-brewed to decent folk that come to Holywood Kirk.'

Burns patted her on the shoulder and said: 'Janet, Janet, sin awa', and I'll protect ye.'

In 'A Winter Night' Burns reveals a deep and genuine sympathy with the outlying cattle, the poor sheep hiding from the storm, the wee helpless birds, and even for the fox and the wolf; and mourns because the pitiless tempest beats on them.

Carlyle says of 'A Winter Night' that 'it

is worth seven homilies on mercy, for it is the voice of Mercy herself. Burns indeed lives in sympathy; his soul rushes into all the realms of being; nothing that has existence can be indifferent to him.'

The auld farmer's 'New Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie,' reveals a profound and affectionate sympathy more tender than the pity he felt for the animals and birds that suffered from the winter storm. It is based on long years of friendly association in co-operative achievement. From the New Year's wish at the beginning, to the end, where he assures her that she is no less deserving now than she was

That day ye pranced wi' muckle pride  
When ye bure hame my bonnie bride;  
And sweet and gracefu' she did ride  
Wi' maiden air!

and tells her that he has a heapet feed of oats laid by for her, and will also tether her on a reserved ridge of fine pasture, where she may have plenty to eat and a comfortable place on which to rest; each verse is full of pleasant memories.

His kindly sympathy is as appreciative as if she had been a human being instead of a mare.



‘Poor Mailie’s Elegy’ is a natural expression of sorrow in the heart—the great, loving heart of Burns—for the death of the pet lamb. He says :

He’s lost a friend and neighbour dear  
In Mailie dead.  
Thro’ a’ the toun she trotted by him ;  
A lang half-mile she could descry him ;  
Wi’ kindly bleat, when she did spy him,  
She ran wi’ speed ;  
A friend mair faithfu’ ne’er cam nigh him,  
Than Mailie dead.

So in the pathos and emotion shown for the mouse whose home his plough destroyed at the approach of winter ; for the wounded hare that limped past him ; for the starving thrush with which he offered to share his last crust ; and for the scared water-fowl that flew from him, when he regretted that they had reason to do so on account of man’s treatment of them, he gives ample evidence of the warmth of the glow of his sympathy.

One of the most prominent characteristics of Burns was loyalty to his native land. One of his earliest dreams, when he was a boy, was a hope that some day he might be able to do something that would bring honour to Scotland. In his Epistle to Mrs Scott of Wauchope-House he says :

I mind it weel, in early date,  
 When I was beardless, young, and blate, bashful

When first amang the yellow corn  
 A man I reckoned was,

E'en then a wish (I mind its power),  
 A wish that to my latest hour  
 Shall strongly heave my breast ;  
 That I for poor auld Scotland's sake  
 Some usefu' plan or book could make,  
 Or sing a sang at least.

The rough burr-thistle, spreading wide  
 Amang the bearded bear, barley

I turned the weeder-clips aside  
 And spared the symbol dear :

No nation, no station,  
 My envy e'er could raise ;

A Scot still, but blot still, without  
 I knew nae higher praise.

The boy who had such a reverent feeling in his heart for the thistle, the symbol of his native land, that he did not like to cut it, continued throughout his life to have a reverence for the land itself, and tried to honour it in every possible way.

He did make the book and sing the songs that brought more lasting glory to Scotland than any other work done by any other man or combination of men in his time.

He wrote more than two hundred and fifty love-songs, and he refused to accept a shilling for them, though he needed money very badly. Many of his love-songs were the direct out-pouring of his heart, the overflow of his love for Nellie Kirkpatrick and Peggy Thomson, the girl lovers of his boyhood ; and for Alison Begbie, Jean Armour, Mary Campbell, and Mrs M'Lehose ; but most of his love-songs were 'fictitious,' as he said they were in the inscription on the copy of his works presented to Jean Lorimer, the Chloris of his Ellisland and Dumfries period. They were written mainly to provide pure language and thought for fine melodies of Scotland composed long before his time ; but the words of the songs that were sung to them were indelicate. He wrote his unequalled songs for Scotland's sake, and by doing so he gave to Scotland the gift of the sweetest love-songs ever written. But for these sacred songs his patriotic spirit resented the idea of acceptance of material reward. No higher revelation of genuine patriotism was ever shown than this.

Burns was a sensitive and very shy man. He is commonly supposed to have been just the opposite. He was brought up in a home at Mount Oliphant where he rarely associated with other people. Months sometimes passed

without an evening spent in any other way than in reading and discussions of the matter read by his father, Gilbert, and himself; so in boyhood and early youth he was reserved. When he began to go out among other young men his comparatively developed mind, his very unusual stores of knowledge—not merely stored, but classified and related—and his extraordinary power of eloquence made him at once a leader and a favourite, so he soon overcame his reserve and shyness with young men. It was not so with young women. He had been trained to wait for introductions to them. He was walking past Jean Armour, when she was at the town pump at Mauchline getting water to sprinkle the clothes on the bleaching-green, without speaking to her, and she spoke to him, recalling a remark she heard him make at the annual dance on the evening of the fair. He was twenty-five, and she was eighteen. He would have passed close to her in respectful silence if she had not spoken.

Sir Walter Scott wrote: ‘I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential.’

Scott did not mean to suggest a doubt about what he was told, but just to intimate that he had not had opportunity to observe the fact. Scott met Burns only once in

company, and Scott was a boy at the time.

He dearly and reverently loved Alison Begbie when he was twenty-one. She was the first woman whom he asked to become his wife. She was a servant in a farm-house on the banks of Cessnock Water, in the neighbourhood of Lochlea farm. He was twenty-two when he asked her to marry him, and he was so shy, even at that age, that he could not propose when he was with her. She did not accept his offer. Few women of his acquaintance would have refused to accept his written proposal. Probably none of them—not even Alison Begbie—would have refused him if he had been able to overcome his shyness, and had proposed in person instead of by letter.

He wrote five letters to Alison Begbie, and definitely asked her to marry him in the fourth letter. In the first he said: ‘I am a stranger in these matters, as I assure you that you are the first woman to whom I ever made such a declaration, so I declare I am at a loss how to proceed. I have more than once come into your company with a resolution to say what I have just now told you; but my resolution always failed me, and even now my heart trembles for the consequence of what I have said.’

The following copies of the letter containing his proposal (the fourth), and of his reply to her refusal, if read carefully, should reveal several admirable characteristics of Burns.

‘LOCHLEA, 1781.

‘MY DEAR E.,\*—I have often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love that, though in every other situation in life, telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a Lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere, and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct; but to a man whose heart glows with the principles of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment, and purity of manners—to such a one in such circumstances I can assure you, my Dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, *Courtship* is a task indeed.

\* Her name was spelled Alison or Elison.



There is such a number of foreboding fears, and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak or what to write I am altogether at a loss.

‘There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is, honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be used by any one in so noble, so generous a passion as Virtuous Love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and, I will add, of a Christian. There is one thing, my Dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this: that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

‘It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further, that if a behaviour

regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of Honour and Virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness; if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend and sincere lover.'

After her refusal he wrote :

'LOCHLEA, 1781.

'I ought in good manners to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write to you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; you "were very sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me—what without you I can never obtain—you wish me all kinds of happiness." It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish that, wanting you, I can never taste.

‘Your uncommon personal advantages, and your superior good sense, do not so much strike me; these possibly in a few instances may be met with in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender, feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm, feeling heart—these I never again expect to meet with in such a degree in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond anything I have ever met with in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination had fondly flattered itself with a wish—I dare not say it ever reached a hope—that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress, still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you, and as I expect to remove in a few days a little farther off, and you, I suppose, will perhaps soon leave this place, I wish to see you or hear from you soon; and if an expression should perhaps escape me rather too warm for friendship, I

hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss ——  
 (pardon me the dear expression for once),  
‘ R. B.’

Those who say that these letters ‘have an air of taskwork and constraint about them’ should remember that Burns formed the style of his letter-writing when but a boy from a book containing the letters of leaders of Queen Anne’s time, which was given to him by his uncle. His own letters on all subjects are written in a dignified style. It is worth noting that Motherwell, who criticised the style of the letters, says of them: ‘They are, in fact, the only sensible love-letters we have ever seen.’

Though naturally a very shy man, he grew to be happier as his powers developed. In his teens and young manhood he had fits bordering on despondency. But he passed through them and became more buoyant in spirit, and, though poor, was contented.

In ‘My Nannie O’ he wrote :

Come weel, come woe, I care na by,  
 I’ll tak what Heaven will sen’ me.

In ‘It is na, Jean, thy Bonnie Face,’ he said :

Content am I if Heaven shall give  
 But happiness to thee.

This shows that consideration for others was one of his sources of happiness.

In his 'Epistle to James Smith' he wrote :

Truce with peevish, poor complaining !  
Is Fortune's fickle Luna waning ?  
E'en let her gang !  
Beneath what light she has remaining  
Let 's sing our sang.

Dr John M'Kenzie of Mauchline, in 1810, thirteen years after the death of Burns, described a visit made to see his father when he was ill. In it he says: 'Gilbert, in the first interview I had with him at Lochlea, was frank, modest, well-informed, and communicative. The poet seemed distant, suspicious, and without any wish to interest or please. He kept himself very silent in a dark corner of the room; and before he took any part in the conversation, I frequently detected him scrutinising me during my conversation with his father and brother.

'But afterwards, when the conversation, which was on a medical subject, had taken the turn he wished, he began to engage in it, displaying a dexterity of reasoning, an ingenuity of reflection, and a familiarity with topics apparently beyond his reach, by which his visitor was no less gratified than astonished.'

Burns lived next door to Dr M'Kenzie after he was married the second time to Jean Armour. They were great friends. Burns wrote a masonic poem to him, and called him 'Common-sense' in 'The Holy Fair.'

In the letter from which the above quotation is made, Dr M'Kenzie says Robert took his characteristics mainly from his mother, and that Gilbert resembled his father.

Burns looked like his mother, and inherited his temperamental characteristics mainly from her.

Burns had a definitely religious tendency as one of his strong characteristics when he was a child. In the sketch of his life that he wrote to Dr Moore, of London, when he was twenty-eight years old, he says that as a boy he possessed 'an enthusiastic idiot-piety. I say idiot-piety because I was then a child.'

He wrote several religious poems while living on Lochlea farm and on Mossgiel farm. 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' was written at Mossgiel.

Throughout his life his religious tendency was one of his characteristics. This will be considered more fully in the chapter on 'Burns's Great Work for Religion.'

Burns was the warm, personal friend of the



best people in every district in or near which he lived. He must have been a good man who could count among his friends such men and women as the following : Lord Glencairn, Mrs Dunlop, the Earl of Eglintoun, Dr Moore, Dr M'Kenzie, Gavin Hamilton, Hon. Henry Erskine, the Duchess of Gordon, Right Rev. Bishop Geddes, Robert Graham of Fintry, Robert Riddell, Robert Aiken, the Earl of Buchan, Prof. Dugald Stewart, Dr Candlish, Sir John Whitefoord, John Murdoch, Dr Blacklock, Dr Hugh Blair, Alex. Cunningham, Rev. Archibald Alison, Sir John Sinclair, Rev. John M'Math, and the best ministers of the 'New Light,' or progressive class ; the leading professors in Edinburgh University, and the leading schoolmasters in his neighbourhood. In fact, he was loved and respected by leaders of all classes except the 'Auld Licht' preachers. He lives on and becomes more popular as he becomes better known.

His one characteristic that would most fully represent him and his work for God and humanity is his propelling tendency to be a reformer of conditions. He accepted no existing conditions as good enough. He saw quickly and clearly the defects of conditions as they existed, and he never hesitated to attack any evil that he could help to over-

throw. He saw that individual freedom and pure religion were vital and essential elements of human progress and happiness. He saw with unerring vision the lack of freedom and of vital religion in the lives of the people; so to make all men free, to give all children equal opportunity to develop the best in their souls, and to purify religion from superstition, hypocrisy, bigotry, and kindred evils that were blighting it, became his highest purposes.

What was the character of Burns in the estimation of the leading people of his own time? On replying to a request that he would use his influence in favour of Burns for an appointment Sir John Whitefoord wrote: 'Your character as a man, as well as a poet, entitles you, I think, to the assistance of every inhabitant of Ayrshire.'

Sir John owned the Ballochmyle estate near Mauchline, and was one of the leading country gentlemen of Ayrshire in his time.

Mr Archibald Prentice, editor of the *Manchester Times*, was the son of a prominent man who lived about half-way between Mauchline and Edinburgh, at Covington, in Lanarkshire. Mr Prentice, senior, was a great admirer of Burns, as were leaders everywhere. Mr Archibald Prentice, writing about his father's affectionate respect for Burns, said:

‘My father, though a strictly moral and religious man himself, always maintained that the virtues of the poet greatly predominated over his faults. I once heard him exclaim with hot wrath, when somebody was quoting from an apologist, “What! do *they* apologise for *him*! One half of his good, and all his bad divided among a score of them, would make them a’ better men!”

‘In the year 1809 I resided for a short time in Ayrshire, in the hospitable house of my father’s friend Reid, and surveyed with a strong interest such visitors as had known Burns. I soon learned how to anticipate their representations of his character. The men of strong minds and strong feelings were invariable in their expressions of admiration; but the *prosy*, consequential *bodies* all disliked him as exceedingly dictatorial. The men whose religion was based on intellect and high moral sentiment all thought well of him; but the mere professors [of religion] “with their three-mile prayers and half-mile graces” denounced him as worse than an infidel.’

The progress of religious reformers has always been a thorny one. The Master, Christ Himself, was crucified by the ‘Auld Lights’ of His time, and they stoned Stephen to death. So, through the centuries unpro-

gressive theologians have persecuted and often murdered the religious reformers, who saw the evils in theology, and wished to remove them from the creeds that blighted men's souls. They burned Latimer in England; and Luther in Germany was saved by the action of his friends by shutting him in Wartburg Castle for protection. Religious reformers in the time of Burns were not burned or stoned to death, but they were persecuted and prosecuted before the Church Courts by men who did not approve of their higher visions of truth. Burns himself was regarded as unorthodox, but his creed is much more in harmony with the religious thought of to-day than it was with the creed of the 'Auld Licht' preachers. One of the marvels of human development through the ages has been that the bigoted theologians of each succeeding century resented the attempts of men with clearer vision to reform their creeds.

Men who truly believe in God cannot believe that any creed made by men can be infallible; they should know that from generation to generation humanity consciously grows towards the Divine, and that as they climb they see in the clearer spiritual air new visions of higher meaning in regard to life and to vital religion, revealing to each man new

conceptions of his duty to God and to his fellow-men.

Lovers of Burns reverence his memory because he was so great and so wise a reformer, and did so much to make men truly free, and to make religion a more vitally uplifting agency in the hearts of men.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BURNS WAS A RELIGIOUS MAN.

‘BURNS a religious man!’ scoffers exclaim. ‘He was a drunkard.’ Burns was a moderate drinker compared with most of the ministers of his time. If drinking whisky was a disqualification for religious character in the time of Burns, a large proportion of the ministers of his time were disqualified. Burns should not, in all fairness, be judged by the standards of our time. More than fifty years after Burns died it was customary for even Methodist ministers in Canada, when visiting the members of their churches, to accept a little whisky punch as an evidence of good fellowship and comradeship. This custom persisted in Scotland and England for more than a century after Burns died, and in many places it exists still. In a letter to Mr William Cruickshank in 1788 he said: ‘I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this country—the object of all hosts being to send every guest to bed drunk if they can.’

Burns was not speaking of hotel-keepers,



but of homes of people of high respectability. He wrote in 1793: 'Taverns I have totally abandoned, but it is the private parties in the family way among the hard-drinking gentlemen of the country that do me the mischief.'

He did occasionally go to the Globe Tavern in Dumfries after 1793, when the guest of visitors who came to Dumfries solely for the purpose of meeting him and having the honour of entertaining him.

In his short life of Burns, Alexander Smith says: 'If he drank hard, it was in an age when hard drinking was fashionable. If he sinned in this respect, he sinned in company with English Prime Ministers, Scotch Lords of Session, grave dignitaries of the Church in both countries, and thousands of ordinary blockheads who went to their graves in the odour of sanctity, and whose epitaphs are a catalogue of all the virtues.'

Burns spoke with all sincerity, in a letter to his friend Samuel Clark of Dumfries, when he wrote: 'Some of our folks about the Excise office, Edinburgh, had, and perhaps still have, conceived a prejudice against me as being a drunken, dissipated character. I might be all this, you know, and yet be an honest fellow; but you know that *I am an honest fellow*, and am nothing of this.' His superiors in the

Excise department gave him a high record for accuracy and honesty in his work.

Other objectors say: 'He could not be religious, because he attacked religion.' This statement is not correct. He attacked the evils that in his time robbed religion of its vital power, but never religion. Emerson says: 'Not Luther, not Latimer, struck stronger blows against false theology than did the poet Burns.'

To Clarinda, Burns wrote: 'I hate the superstition of a fanatic, but I love the religion of a man.'

In his poem 'The Tree of Liberty' he lays the blame of the terrible degradation of the French peasantry on

Superstition's wicked brood.

In his 'Epistle to John Goudie' he speaks of

Poor gapin', glowrin' superstition.

He attacked superstition, but not religion.

He attacked hypocrisy, and true men are grateful to him because he did so.

In his 'Epistle to Rev. John M'Math,' the 'New Licht' minister of Tarbolton, Burns says:

God knows I'm not the thing I should be,  
Nor am I ev'n the thing I could be;  
But twenty times I rather would be  
An atheist clean,

Than under gospel colours hid be  
Just for a screen.

He ridiculed hypocrisy, and we are grateful to him for doing so. Nothing more contemptible than a religious hypocrite can be made of a being created in the image of God. Hypocrisy is not religion.

He attacked bigotry, one of the most savage monsters that ever tried to block the way of Christ's highest teaching, the brotherhood of man. No phenomenal religious absurdity is more incomprehensible than the idea that Christianity can be promoted by the multiplication of religious denominations; especially when, as in the time of Burns, and long after his time, leaders of so-called Christian denominations refused to have fellowship with each other, or to unite on a common platform in working for the promotion of Christian ideals. How trivial the formalisms of theologians seem that kept men apart whom Christ desired to become co-operative and loving brothers, working harmoniously together for the achievement of the great visions he revealed!

He wrote to Clarinda, 1788: 'I hate the very idea of a controversial divinity; and I firmly believe that every upright, honest man, of whatever sect, will be accepted of the Deity.'

In his 'Epistle to John Goudie' Burns calls bigotry

Sour bigotry on its last legs.

He wrote this in 1785, and much more than a century later bigotry is still on its legs, but it is tottering to its final overthrow. Burns attacked bigotry, but not religion.

He attacked the doctrine of predestination, as taught in his time, a most soul-dwarfing doctrine, calculated to rob humanity of motives to stimulate it to greater and nobler efforts to achieve for God. He makes Holy Willie say he deserved damnation five thousand years before he was born. Few people now regard predestination as an element in vital religion.

He attacked one of the most horribly blasphemous doctrines ever preached, but preached in the time of Burns, and long after :

That God sends ane to heaven and ten to hell  
For His ain glory.

He puts this impious doctrine into the mouth of Holy Willie. More than half a century after the time of Burns, preachers in the presence of mothers of their dead babies taught that the babes could not go to heaven because they were too young to be 'believers in Christ;' and being unable to account for

their statements logically, would say, 'God did these things for His own glory.' Burns attacked such horrible teaching, but in doing so he was not attacking religion.

Burns did not believe in the use of the fear of hell as a means of promoting true religion. There is no soul-kindling power in fear. Fear is one of the most powerful agencies of evil in preventing the conscious development of the soul, and of the faith that each soul should have in God as the source of power, in Christ as the revealer of individual power, and in himself as God's partner. Fear is a negative agency that appeals to the weaker side of character. Humanity will not be able to make the rapid progress towards the Divine that it should make until fear ceases to be a motive in the minds of men, women, and children. In his great 'Epistle to a Young Friend' Burns says :

The fear o' hell 's a hangman's whip

To haud the *wretch* in order.

keep

Burns proved himself to be a philosopher when he attacked the common plan of using fear o' hell to make men religious. This was not attacking religion.

The Rev. L. MacLean Watt says : ' While the professional Christians of Scotland were

fighting about Hell, the humble hearts by the lowly firesides, with the open book before them, were enriched by the knowledge of heaven; and while the hypocrites in holy places were scourging those who were in their power with the thorns of Christ, there were cotters in their kitchens that had found the healing and the balm of the warm blood of a Redeemer who died on Calvary for *a wider world* than theologians seemed to know.'

Speaking further of the theologians of the time of Burns the Rev. Mr Watt says: 'Their idea of God was shaped in fashion like themselves—merciless, remorseless, hating, and hateful; His only passion seeming to their narrow souls to be damnation and torture of the wretched, lost, and wandering. Their preachers loved to picture the souls of the condemned swathed in batches lying in eternal anguish of a most real blazing hell as punishment for some small offence, or as having been outcast from grace through the wanton exercise of divine prerogatives. To commend such a God for worship were like praising and complimenting the cruel child who, for sport, spent a whole day plucking the limbs and wings from the palpitating body of some poor, helpless insect. It was a false and blasphemous insult to the human intelligence.'



Burns had the good fortune to be a cotter, trained by a father who was a remarkably able man, a great teacher, and a reverently religious man of very advanced ideals; and it took a century or more of theological evolution to bring the religious teaching of the world up to the standards of belief of the Ayrshire cotter.

He attacked the doctrine of Faith without Works. In a letter to Gavin Hamilton, one of the leading men of the town of Mauchline, a warm, personal friend of the poet, and an advanced thinker among 'New Licht' laymen, he wrote in a humorous but really profound way: 'I understand you are in the habit of intimacy with that Boanerges of Gospel powers, Father Auld. Be earnest with him that he will wrestle in prayer for you that you may see the vanity of vanities in trusting to, even practising, the carnal moral works of charity, humanity, and generosity; things which you practised so flagrantly that it was evident you delighted in them, neglecting, or perhaps profanely despising, the wholesome doctrine of *faith without works*, the only hope of salvation.'

Burns did not say a word against faith in Christ, or love for Christ, or reverence for the teaching of Christ. So true a Christian as Dean Stanley said Burns was a 'wise religious

teacher.' Burns deplored the fact that the love of Christ—the highest revelation of love ever given to the world—should be limited to saving the individual believer from eternal punishment. That was degrading the highest love into selfishness. Burns pleaded for loving service for humanity, and for Christ's highest revelation, brotherhood, as evidence of vital Christian-hood; not merely 'sound believing.' This was not attacking religion. He attacked the men who attacked other men, like Gavin Hamilton among laymen, and Rev. Dr M'Gill of Ayr among ministers, because they had advanced ideas regarding religion.

He attacked the gloom and awful Sunday solemnity of those who professed to be religious. The world owes him a debt of gratitude for helping to remove the shadows of religious gloom from human lives. In his poem 'A Dedication,' addressed to Gavin Hamilton, he advises him ironically, in order that he may be acceptable to Daddy Auld and others of the 'Auld Licht' creed, to

Learn three-mile pray'rs an' half-mile graces,  
Wi' weel-spread looves, an' lang, wry faces; palms  
Grunt up a solemn, lengthened groan,  
And damn a' parties [religious] but your own;  
I'll warrant then you're nae deceiver,  
A steady, sturdy, staunch believer.

If true religion means anything vitally hopeful to a man, it should mean what Burns said it meant to him in a letter to Mrs Dunlop: 'My dearest enjoyment.'

In his wise poem, 'Epistle to a Young Friend,' he says :

But still the preaching cant forbear,  
And ev'n the rigid feature.

He attacked the 'unco guid,' who delighted to tell how good they were themselves, and how many were the weaknesses and evil-doings of their neighbours. He had no more respect for the self-righteous than Christ had. The fact that he attacked and exposed them, and spoke kindly and reasonably to them, in his great 'Address to the Unco Guid,' is an evidence that in this respect at any rate he was a true Christian. One of the most comprehensively Christian doctrines ever written is the verse :

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us ;  
He knows each heart—its various tone,  
Each spring—its various bias.

Then at the balance let 's be mute,  
We never can adjust it ;  
What 's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what 's resisted.

There is sound philosophy in the first verse of the poem addressed to the unco guid :

The rigid righteous is a fool,  
The rigid wise another.

He often advised the 'douce folks' to be considerate of those who had greater temptations than they knew ; and advised them to try to help them to overcome their temptations, and with Christian comradeship win their admiration and sympathetic co-operation in some department of achieving good.

In the time of Burns nothing would have surprised a wayward man or woman more than to have received genuine sympathy and respectful comradeship from members of the Church, the institution that claimed to represent Christ, who told the story of the one stray lamb, and the story of the prodigal son ; the Great Teacher who said, 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.'

Burns attacked superstition, hypocrisy, bigotry, predestination (taught in its most repellent form in the time of Burns), the equally repellent doctrine that 'God sends men to hell for His own glory ;' fear of hell as a basis of religious life ; faith without works ; religious gloom ; and the spirit of the unco guid. He helped to free religion from these evils more

than any other man of his time did ; but that was just the opposite to attacking religion.

In the 'Holy Fair' and 'The Twa Herds' he criticised with biting sarcasm certain things connected with religion in his time, from which it is now happily free. But he did not attack religion. The Rev. L. MacLean Watt, when summing up the great work Burns did for true religion, especially in 'The Holy Fair,' 'The Twa Herds,' and 'Holy Willie's Prayer,' says : 'It was in consequence of this ecclesiastical contact that he was, ere long, involved in a bitter and incessant warfare with the mediæval shadows of ultra - Calvinism, which laid upon the people the bondage of a rigid predestinarianism, the terrible result of which in parochial religion was, that it became a commonplace in the matter of conduct that it did not matter what you did so long as you believed certain hard and fast tenets dealing with the purpose of God and the future of the human soul. This could not but inevitably lead to the observation of grave discrepancies between creed and conduct ; and the setting up of the greatest hypocrisies, veiled in the cloak of religiousness, that yet, with searching eye of judgment, sat testing the conduct of better men. Burns was one of the better men.'

His own attitude towards true religion is shown in his 'Epistle to the Rev. John M'Math,' a progressive Presbyterian minister in Tarbolton. In it he says :

All hail, Religion ! maid divine !  
Pardon a muse sae mean as mine,  
Who in her rough, imperfect line  
Thus daurs to name thee ;  
To stigmatise *false friends* of thine  
Can ne'er defame thee.

He stigmatised false friends of religion, but not religion itself.

There are some who yet say 'Burns could not have been a religious man, because he was a sceptic.' Burns was an independent thinker. His mind did not accept dogmas or creeds without investigation. In his father's fine school he was not trained to think he was thinking, when he was merely allowing the ideas of others to run through his head on the path of memory. Burns was not trained to believe that he believed, but to think till he believed ; and to accept in the realm beyond his power to reason great fundamental principles that supplied the conscious needs of his own heart, as those principles are revealed in the Bible.

In a letter to Mrs Dunlop he wrote : ' I am a very sincere believer in the Bible ; but I am



drawn by the conviction of a man, not by the halter of an ass.'

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote, 1788: 'My idle reasonings sometimes made me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my own heart always gave the cold philosophisings the lie.'

To Mr Peter Stuart he wrote, referring to the poet Fergusson, 1789: 'Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all Nature, which I am sure there is—thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is the distinction of man.'

To Mrs Dunlop, to whom more than to any other person he revealed the depths of his heart, he wrote again, 1789: 'In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.'

To Robert Aiken he wrote, 1786: 'Though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stunted bourne of our present existence.'

To Dr Candlish, of Edinburgh, he wrote, 1787: 'Despising old women's stories, I ventured into the daring path Spinoza trod, but my experience with the weakness, not the strength, of human power *made me glad to grasp revealed religion.*'

To Clarinda he wrote, 1788: 'The Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this for wise and good ends known to Himself into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great personage whose relation to Him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is that of a Guide and Saviour.'

In his epistle to his young friend Andrew Aiken, he sums up in two lines his attitude to scepticism:

An atheist's laugh 's a poor exchange  
For Deity offended.

The men who believe most profoundly are those who honestly doubted in early life, but who naturally loved truth, and sought it with hopeful minds till they found it. Burns was not a sceptic. He was a reverently religious man. No man could have written 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' who was not a reverently religious man. His father, from the earliest years, when his children were old enough to understand them, began to teach

them fundamental religious principles. They took root deeply in Robert's mind. William Burns preferred not to use the 'Shorter Catechism,' so he wrote a special catechism for his own family. It is a remarkable production for a man in his position in life. It deals with vitally fundamental principles, and shows a clear understanding of the Bible.

Burns wrote several short religious poems in his early young manhood, probably his twenty-second and twenty-third years, showing that his mind was deeply impressed by the majesty, justice, and love of God. Two of these poems are paraphrases of the Psalms.

The fact that religion was one of the most important elements of his thought and life is amply proved by the five letters he wrote to Alison Begbie in his twenty-first and twenty-second years—even before he wrote his early religious poems. Love-letters though they were, they related nearly as much to religion as to love. Some people have tried to say irreverently smart things about the absurdity of writing about religion in letters to his loved one. Both the religion and the love of his letters to the first woman he ever asked to marry him are too sacred to provoke ridicule in the minds of men with proper reverence for either religion or love. No one can care-

fully read these five letters without having a deeper respect for Burns, the young gentleman who loved so deeply that he regarded love worthy to be placed in association with religion. Religion was the subject that had been given first place in his life and thought by the teaching and the life of his father, who had meant infinitely more to him than most fathers ever mean to their sons.

In his epistle to Andrew Aiken he recommends, in the last verse but one, two things of vast importance ‘when on life we’re tempest-driv’n’: first,

A conscience but a canker.                      without

Second,

A correspondence fixed wi’ Heaven  
Is sure a noble anchor.

Many people read the last couplet without consciously thinking what a correspondence fixed with Heaven means. Clearly it may have three meanings: prayer, communion in spirit with the Divine, and similarity to or harmony with the divine spirit.

Burns had family worship in his home every day to the end of his life when he was not absent, and though some scoffers may smile, he was earnest and sincere in trying to conduct for himself and for his family a ‘corre-

spondence fixed with heaven' in a spirit of communion with the Divine Father. He had other altars for communion with God in addition to his home. He composed his poems in the gloaming after his day's work, in favourite spots in the deep woods, where he was 'hid with God' alone. God revealed Himself to Burns in the woods and by the sides of his sacred rivers more fully than in any other places. One of the most sacred shrines in Scotland is the great root under one of the mighty beeches of the fine park on Ballochmyle estate, on which Burns sat so often to compose his poems in the long Scottish twilights, and later on in the moonlight, when he lived on Mossgiel farm. Then next night, at his desk over the stable at Mossgiel, he would rewrite them and improve their form.

No man but a religious man would have written, in his 'Epistle to a Young Friend,' as Burns did to Andrew Aiken:

'The great Creator to revere  
Must sure become the creature.

When in Irvine, in his twenty-third year, he wrote a letter to his father. As usual, he wrote not of trivial matters, but of the great realities of time and eternity. Among other serious things he wrote: 'My principal, and,

indeed, my only pleasurable, employment is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way.' In the same letter he wrote :

The soul, uneasy and confined, at home  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.\*

Burns follows this quotation by saying to his father: 'It is for this reason that I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th Chapter of Revelation than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that the world has to offer.'

His imagination enabled him to see clearly the glories of joy, and service, and association, and reward, in the heavenly paradise, as revealed in those triumphant verses.

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote, 1788: 'Religion, my honoured Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment. . . . An irreligious poet would be a monster.'

In his 'Grace before Eating' he reveals his gratitude and conscious dependence on God :

O Thou, who kindly dost provide  
For every creature's want !

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\* One of John Murdoch's quotations used as a headline to be copied in his copy-book.



We bless Thee, God of Nature wide,  
For all Thy goodness lent.

In 'Winter : a Dirge' he says, in reverent submission to God's will :

Thou Power supreme, whose mighty scheme  
Those woes of mine fulfil,  
Here firm I rest, they must be best,  
Because they are Thy Will.

In a poem to Clarinda he wrote, recognising the blessing of God's universal presence, not in awe so much as in joy :

God is ever present, ever felt,  
In the void waste, as in the city full ;  
And where He vital breathes, there must be joy !

In the 'Cotter's Saturday Night' he teaches absolute faith in God, and indicates man's true relationship to the Divine Father :

Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,  
Implore His counsel and assisting might :  
They never sought in vain, that sought the Lord aright.

Writing in condemnation of a miserably selfish miser, he said :

See these hands, ne'er stretched to save,  
Hands that took, but never gave ;  
Keeper of Mammon's iron chest,  
Lo, there she goes, unpitied and unblest ;  
She goes, but not to realms of everlasting rest.

And are they of no more avail,  
Ten thousand glittering pounds a year ?  
In other worlds can Mammon fail,  
Omnipotent as he is here ?  
O, bitter mockery of the pompous bier,  
While down the wretched Vital Part is driven !  
The cave-lodged beggar, with a conscience clear,  
Expires in rags, unknown, and goes to heaven.

The philosophy of his mind, and the affectionate sympathy of his heart made Burns believe that unselfish service for our fellow-men should be one of the manifestations of true religion.

In the fine poem he wrote to Mrs Dunlop on New Year's Day, 1790, he says :

A few days may, a few years must,  
Repose us in the silent dust.  
Then is it wise to damp our bliss ?  
Yes—all such reasonings are amiss !  
The voice of Nature loudly cries,  
And many a message from the skies,  
That something in us never dies ;  
That on this frail, uncertain state  
Hang matters of eternal weight ;  
That future life in worlds unknown  
Must take its hue from this alone ;  
Whether as heavenly glory bright,  
Or dark as Misery's woeful night.  
Let us the important Now employ,  
And live as those who never die.

Since, then, my honoured first of friends,  
On this poor living all depends.

Any honest man who reads those lines must admit that Burns was a man of deep religious thought and feeling.

Mrs Dunlop, to whom he wrote so many letters, was one of the leading women of Scotland in her time. She was a woman of great wisdom and deep religious character. Like the other great people who knew Burns, she was his friend. Many of his clearest expressions of his religious opinions are contained in his letters to her. In a letter to her on New Year's morning, 1789, he said: 'I have some favourite flowers in Spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the foxglove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birk [birch], and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in the Summer noon, or the wild, mixing cadence of a troop of grey-plover in an Autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of Devotion or Poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery that, like the *Æolian* harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings

argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to these proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man’s immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave—these proofs that we deduct by dint of our own powers of observation. However respectable Individuals in all ages have been, I have ever looked on Mankind in the lump to be nothing better than a foolish, head-strong, credulous, unthinking Mob; and their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me. Still, I am a very sincere believer in the Bible.’

In September 1789 he wrote to Mrs Dunlop: ‘Religion, my dear friend, is true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposition so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it.’

To Mrs Dunlop, in 1792, he wrote: ‘I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that

your little god-son [his son], and every creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.'

One of his most beautiful religious letters was written to Alexander Cunningham, of Edinburgh, in 1794: 'Still there are two pillars that bear us up amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The *one* is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The *other* is made up of those feelings and sentiments which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast may disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with and link us to, those awful, obscure realities—an all-powerful and equally beneficent God, and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field; the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.

'I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of the crafty FEW, to lead the

undiscerning MANY ; or at most as an uncertain obscurity, which mankind can never know anything of, and with which they are fools if they give themselves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what, to me and to others, were such superlative sources of enjoyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment, and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart ; and an imagination, delighted with the painter and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the glowing luxuriance of the spring ; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all Nature, and thro' Nature up to Nature's God ; his soul, by swift delighting degrees, is rapt above this sublunary sphere, until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson :



“These, as they change, Almighty Father—these  
Are but the varied God ; the rolling year  
Is full of thee,”

‘and so on, in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn.

‘These are no ideal pleasures ; they are real delights ; and I ask what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say equal, to them ? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious Virtue stamps them for her own, and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God.’

In 1788 he wrote to Clarinda : ‘My definition of worth is short : truth and humanity respecting our fellow-creatures ; reverence and humility in the presence of that Being, my Creator and Preserver, and who, I have every reason to believe, will be my judge.’

Again to Clarinda he wrote in 1788 : ‘He who is our Author and Preserver, and will one day be our Judge, must be—not for His sake in the way of duty, but from the natural impulse of our hearts—the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration. He is almighty and all-bounteous ; we are weak and dependent ; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion. “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come

to everlasting life ;” consequently it must be in every one’s power to embrace His offer of everlasting life ; otherwise He could not in justice condemn those who did not.’

Again in 1788 he wrote to Clarinda : ‘ In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a Compassionate Deity, an Almighty Protector, are doubly dear.’

To Mrs Dunlop, in 1795, a year and a half before he died, he wrote : ‘ I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes ; but I look on the man who is firmly persuaded of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment ; a firm prop and stay in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress ; and a never-failing anchor of hope when he looks beyond the grave.’

This quotation emphasises his lifelong faith in God, and his belief in his own immortality. It also shows his perfect freedom from bigotry, and the broadness of his creed.

In his first ‘ Commonplace Book ’ he wrote : ‘ The grand end of Human being is to cultivate an intercourse with that Being to whom we owe life, with every enjoyment that renders

life delightful ; and to maintain an integritive conduct towards our fellow-creatures ; that by so forming Piety and Virtue into habit, we may be fit members for that society of the Pious, and the Good, which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave.'

There are no truly good men who will yield to the temptation to speak sneeringly of any man who fails in his life to reach his highest ideals. The little-minded men who may sneer at Burns, when they read this quotation written in his youth, should read his 'Address to the Unco Guid' over and over, till they get a glimmering comprehension of its meaning. Whatever the puny minds may be focussed on in the life of Burns, they should be 'mute at the balance.' They should remember that Burns did more than any man of his time for true religion, and that to the end of his life his mind and heart overflowed with the same faith and gratitude to God that he almost continuously expressed throughout his life.

A final quotation from the letters of Burns about religion may fittingly be taken from a letter to Robert Aiken, written in 1786: 'O thou unknown Power! Thou Almighty God who hast lighted up Reason in my

breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of Thy works, yet Thou hast never left me nor forsaken me.'

Burns was a reverently religious man. Dean Stanley said: 'Burns was a wise religious teacher.' Principal Rainy objected to Dean Stanley's view because 'Burns had never become a member of a church on profession of Faith in Christ.' Professor Rainy either did not remember, or had never realised, that Burns had done more to reveal Christ's highest teachings—the value of the individual soul, and brotherhood—than any other man in the church, or out of it, in Scotland in his time; and also did more to make religion free from false theology and dwarfing practices, than any other man of his time, or of any other time in Scotland.

Rev. L. MacLean Watt, of Edinburgh, in his most admirable book on Burns, answers Principal Rainy's objections with supreme ability, as the following quotations amply prove: 'Because a man does not categorically declare his belief in Christ, as that belief is formulated in existing dogmatic statements of theological authority, it does not mean that he abhors that belief; nor even though

he withhold himself from explicitly uttering that confession of the Christian faith, does it preclude him from being a religious teacher. A man may have an enormous influence as a religious teacher, and yet never have made a formal statement of Christianity, nor signed a Christian creed.'—'The measure of a man's faithfulness to the better side of his nature is not to be gauged by the depth of his fall, but the height to which he rises. . . . Burns was, unfortunately, confronted by a narrow and self-righteous set, who were enslaved to doctrine and dogma, rather than to the practice of the Christian life with charity and humanity of spirit, part and parcel of a system of petty tyrannies and mean oppressions, the exercise of which made for exile from the fold, because of the spiritual conceit and sectarian humbug which created such characters as "Holy Willie," and the "Unco Guid," with the superior airs of religious security from which they looked down on all besides.'

We should test neither the terrible theologians of his time—those men who attacked Burns and called him irreligious, because he had a clear vision of a higher, holier religion than the one they preached—nor Burns himself by the conditions of our own time.

It is unjust both to Burns and to his enemies to do so.

A comparison of the religious principles of the best Christians in the world nearly a century and a half after his time will show, however, that the creed of the present is more—much more—like the creed of Burns than the creed of the dreadful theologians of his time. The creed of the religious leaders a century hence will be still more like the creed of Robert Burns than is the creed of to-day.

The following creed is taken from the letters of Burns, expressed in his own language, except the last article, which is found in longer form in many of his letters, and more nearly in 'The Hermit,' in which he says :

Let me, O Lord ! from life retire,  
Unknown each guilty, worldly fire,  
Remorse's throb, or loose desire ;  
And when I die  
Let me in this belief expire—  
To God I fly.

#### THE CREED OF ROBERT BURNS.

1. Religion should be a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich.



2. There is a great and incomprehensible Being to whom I owe my existence.
3. The Creator perfectly understands the being He has made.
4. There is a real and eternal distinction between vice and virtue.
5. There must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave.
6. From the sublimity, the excellence, and the purity of His doctrines and precepts, I believe Jesus Christ came from God.
7. Whatever is done to mitigate the woes, or increase the happiness of humanity, is goodness.
8. Whatever injures society or any member of it is iniquity.
9. I believe in the immaterial and immortal nature of man.
10. I believe in eternal life with God.

Carlyle expressed regret that ‘Burns became involved in the religious quarrels of his district.’ This statement proves that Carlyle failed fully to comprehend the religious character of Burns. His chivalrous nature was partly responsible for his entering the battle waged by the ‘Auld Lichts’ against his dear friend the Rev. Dr M’Gill of Ayr and Gavin Hamilton of

Mauchline ; but his chief reason was his innate determination to free religion from the evils taught and practised in the name of religion in his time. He had the soul of a reformer, and the two leading elements in his soul were Religion and Liberty for the individual. It would have robbed the world of one of the greatest steps in human progress towards the Divine made in the eighteenth century, if Burns had failed to be true to the greatest things in his mind and heart.

Carlyle had clearly not studied the religious elements in either the poems or the letters of Burns, or he could not have written his comparison between Burns and Locke, Milton, and Cervantes, who did in poverty and unusual difficulties grand work. He asks : ‘What, then, had these men which Burns wanted ? Two things ; both which, it seems to us, are indispensable for such men. They had a true religious principle of morals, and a single, not a double, aim in their activity. They were not self-seekers and self-worshippers ; but seekers and worshippers of something far better than self. Not personal enjoyment was their object ; but a high heroic idea of Religion, of Patriotism, of Heavenly Wisdom in one form or the other form ever hovered before them.

It passes understanding to comprehend how Carlyle could regard Burns as a 'selfish' man, or a man with 'a double aim'—that is, two conflicting and opposing aims that he wasted his power in trying to harmonise.

Burns had three great aims: Purer Religion, a just Democracy, and closer Brotherhood; but these aims are in perfect harmony.

Carlyle ends the contrast between Burns and his model trio—Locke, Milton, and Cervantes—by saying of Burns: 'He has no religion; in the shallow age, where his days were cast, Religion was not discriminated from the New and Old Light *forms* of Religion; and was, with these, becoming obsolete in the minds of men.'

'The heart not of a mere hot-blooded, popular verse-monger, or poetical *Restaurateur*, but of a true poet and singer, worthy of the old religions heroic, had been given him, and he fell in an age, not of heroism and religion, but of scepticism, selfishness, and triviality, when true nobleness was little understood, and its place supplied by a hollow, dissocial, altogether barren and unfruitful principle of Pride.'

In a just comparison between Burns and the three named by Carlyle, Burns will need no apologists. Burns, directly in opposition

to the statement of Carlyle, was more vitally religious and less selfish than any of them. When twenty-one years of age he said, in one of his beautiful love-letters to Alison Begbie: 'I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathise with the miseries of the unfortunate.' This alone proves that Burns was one of the least selfish men who ever lived.

As an heroic teacher of vital religion Burns was infinitely greater than any other man of his time, and has been much more influential since his time in promoting Christ's ideals than the men named by Carlyle. He was a fearless hero, and so meets the requirements specified by Carlyle, because, when he recognised the evils connected with religion in his time, when true religion was, to use Carlyle's words, 'becoming obsolete,' he valiantly attacked them, hoping to enable his fellow-men to see the vision of true religion which his father had given him by his life and teaching.

There was absolutely no justification for calling Burns a mere verse-monger. To write such a wild nightmare dream about Scotland's greatest and most self-less poet was unworthy of one of Scotland's leading prose-writers.

It seems almost ludicrous to take notice of the assertion that Burns had not a high ideal of patriotism, as compared with the three ideal men of Carlyle—Burns, whose love for Scotland was a sacred feeling, a holy fire that never ceased to burn. This criticism needs no answer now.

## CHAPTER V.

### BURNS THE DEMOCRAT.

No man ever comprehended Christ's ideals regarding democracy more fully than did Burns. Christ based His teaching of the need of human liberty on His revelation of the value of the individual soul. Burns clearly understood Christ's ideals regarding individual freedom, and faithfully followed Him.

The message of Coila in 'The Vision' to Burns was :

Preserve the dignity of man  
With soul erect.

This was the central thought in the work of Burns regarding the freedom of all mankind : freedom from oppression by other men ; freedom from the bondage imposed on the peasant and the labouring man by customs organised by so-called 'higher classes' ; freedom from the hardship and sorrow of poverty ; freedom for each child to grow under proper conditions of nourishment, of physical development, and of educational training.



His whole nature was stirred to dignified indignation and resentment by class distinctions among men and women who were all created in the image of God, and who, in accordance with the teaching of Christ, should be brothers. He despised class distinctions which were made by man, whether the distinctions were made on the basis of rank or wealth. He was ashamed of the toadies who revered a lord merely because he chanced to be born a lord, and pitied those who accepted without protest inferiority to men of wealth. He was so true a democrat that he freely and respectfully recognised the worth of members of the aristocracy or of the wealthy class whose ability and high character made them worthy of respect; but he held in contempt those who assumed superiority simply because of rank or gold.

One of his most brilliant poems is 'A Man's a Man for a' That.' In it he gives comprehensive expression to his opinions, based on the fundamental principle,

The honest man, though e'er sae poor,  
Is King o' men for a' that.

Is there for honesty poverty,  
That hangs his head an' a' that?

The coward-slave, we pass him by ;  
 We dare be poor for a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,  
 Our toils obscure, an' a' that ;  
 The rank is but the guinea stamp,  
 The man 's the gowd for a' that.      gold

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,  
 Wha struts, and stares, an' a' that ;  
 Tho' hundreds worship at his word,  
 He 's but a coof for a' that :      blockhead

For a' that, an' a' that,  
 His ribband, star, an' a' that ;  
 The man of independent mind  
 He looks and laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,  
 A marquis, duke, an' a' that ;  
 But an honest man 's aboon his might,      above  
 Gude faith he maunna fa' that.      must not try

For a' that, an' a' that,  
 Their dignities an' a' that,  
 The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,  
 Are higher ranks than a' that.

Labouring man on farm or in factory, this  
 is your charter. Let this be your creed.  
 Sing this great democratic hymn at your  
 gatherings—ay, sing it in your homes with  
 your children, and each time you sing it, it

should kindle some new light in your soul that will bring you new vision of the greatest fact in connection with human life and duty, that you are alive to be God's partner, and that while you remain honest, and unselfishly consider the rights of others, as fully as you consider your own, you are entitled to stand with kings, because you are an honest man.

The discussion between Cæsar the aristocratic dog and Luath the cotter's dog is a fair representation of class conditions in Scotland in the time of Burns. Cæsar describes the laird's riches, his idleness, his rackèd rents, and the compulsory services required from the poor tenants; dilates on the wastefulness in connection with the meals even of the servants in the homes of the great; and expresses surprise that poor folks could exist under their trying conditions.

Luath admits that sometimes the strain on the cotter was very severe: digging ditches, building dykes with dirty stones, baring a quarry, 'an' sic like,' as a means of sustaining a lot of ragged children with nothing but his hand labour. He acknowledges that, when ill or out of work, it sometimes seems hopeless; but, after all, though past his comprehension, the poor folks are

wonderfully contented, and stately men and clever women are brought up in their homes.

Cæsar then expatiates on the contemptuous way the poor are 'huffed, and cuffed, and disrespecket.' He especially sympathises with the poor on account of the way tenants are treated by the laird's agents on rent-day—compelled to submit to their insolence, while they swear and threaten to seize their property; and concludes that poor folks must be very wretched.

Luath replies that, after all, they are not so wretched as he thinks; that their dearest enjoyments are in their wives and thriving children; that they often forget their private cares and discuss the affairs of kirk and state; that Hallowe'en and Christmas celebrations give them grand opportunities for happiness that make them forget their hardships and sorrows, and that during these festivals the old folks are so cheery and the young ones are so frolicsome that he 'for joy has barket wi' them!' Still, he admits that it is owre true what Cæsar says, and that many decent, honest folk 'are riven out, baith root and branch, some rascal's pridefu' greed to quench.'

Cæsar then describes the reckless way in

which the money received from the poor cotters was wasted at operas, plays, mortgaging, gambling, masquerading, or taking trips to Calais, Vienna, Versailles, Madrid, or Italy ; and finally to Germany, to some resort where their dissipations may be overcome by drinking muddy German water.

Luath is surprised to learn that the money for which the cotters have toiled so hard should be spent so wastefully ; and wishes the gentry would stay at home and take interest in the sports of their own country, as it would be so much better for all : laird, tenant, and cotter. He closes by saying that many of the lairds are not ill-hearted fellows, and asks Cæsar if there is not a great deal of true pleasure in the lives of the rich.

Cæsar replies :

Lord, man, were ye but whyles where I am,  
The gentles ye wad ne'er envy them.

Admitting that they need not starve or work hard through winter's cold or summer's heat, or suffer in old age from working all day in the wet, he says :

But human bodies are sic fools,  
For a' their colleges and schools,  
That when nae real ills perplex them,  
They mak enow themsels to vex them ;

An' aye the less they hae to sturt them,  
In like proportion less will hurt them.

A country fellow at the pleugh,  
His acres till'd, he 's right enough ;  
A country girl at her wheel,  
Her dizzens dune, she 's unco weel ;  
But gentlemen, and ladies warst,  
Wi' ev'n-down want o' wark are curst.  
They loiter, lounging, lank and lazy ;  
Tho' deil-haet ails them, yet uneasy ;  
Their days insipid, dull, an' tasteless ;  
Their nights unquiet, lang, and restless.  
An' even their sports, their balls and races,  
Their galloping through public places,  
There 's sic parade, sic pomp an' art,  
The joy can scarcely reach the heart.

The ladies arm-in-arm in clusters,  
As great and gracious a' as sisters ;  
But hear their absent thoughts o' ither,  
They 're a' run deils and jads thegither.  
Whyles, ower the wee bit cup an' plaitie,  
They sip the scandal-potion pretty ;  
Or lee-lang nights, wi' crabbet leuks,  
Pore ower the devil's pictur'd beuks ;        cards  
Stake on a chance a farmer's stackyard,  
An' cheat like ony unhanged blackguard.  
There 's some exceptions, man an' woman ;  
But this is gentry's life in common.

Burns was a philosopher, and he knew such conditions were wrong, and that they should



not be allowed to last. They are better, after more than a century, since Burns became the champion of the poor; but the great problem, 'Why should ae man better fare, and a' men brothers?' is not properly answered yet. The wisest among the aristocracy know this, and admit it, and sincerely hope that the inevitable evolution to juster conditions and relationships may be brought about by constitutional means, and not by revolution.

Professor Dugald Stewart, of Edinburgh University, wrote: 'I recollect once he told me, when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind none could understand who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and the worth which they contained.'

It was not the unhappiness of the peasantry that stirred the democratic heart of Burns. It was 'man's inhumanity' to his fellow-men; the assumption of those belonging to the so-called upper classes that they had a divine right to hold higher positions than the common people, and that the poorer people should be contented in the 'station to which God had called them,' that led Burns to write so ably in favour of democracy. He recognised

no human right to establish stations to which people were called, and in which they should remain, in spite of their right to fill any positions for which they had proved their fitness. He could not be so irreverent or so unreasonable as to believe God could establish the conditions found all around him, so he claimed the right of every child to full opportunity for its best development, and to rise honourably to any position to which it could attain.

In a letter to Miss Margaret Chalmers, 1788, he wrote: 'What signify the silly, idle gewgaws of wealth, or the idle trumpery of greatness? When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation of everything dishonest, and the same scorn at everything unworthy—in the name of common-sense, are they not equals?'

To Mrs Dunlop he wrote in 1788: 'There are few circumstances, relating to the unequal distribution of good things of this life, that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of the cottage. Last after-

noon I had the honour to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fireside, where the planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day [a regular time twice a year was fixed for hiring servants], and there has been a revolution among those creatures [servants], who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature as Madame, are from time to time—their nerves, sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay, a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years, not only to the necessities but the caprices of the important few. We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But light be the turf upon his breast who taught "Reverence thyself!" We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impertinent wives, and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little, dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.'

Such experiences added fuel to the divine purpose in his mind to free a large portion of

his fellow-countrymen from the bonds that had been bound on their bodies and souls by long years of class presumption and heartless tyranny, which, till Burns attacked them, had grown more unjust and contemptuous as generation succeeded generation.

Burns's reverence for real manhood, a basic principle of true democratic spirit, is shown in the closing verse of his 'Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson':

Go to your sculptured tombs, ye Great,  
In a' the tinsel trash o' state!  
But by thy honest turf I'll wait,  
Thou man of worth!  
And weep the ae best fellow's fate  
E'er lay in earth.

To John Francis Erskine he wrote, 1793:  
'Burns was a poor man from birth and an exciseman from necessity; but—I will say it—the sterling of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. . . . Can I look tamely on and see any machination to wrest from them the birthright of my boys—the little, independent Britons, in whose veins runs my own blood? . . . Does any man tell me that my full efforts can be of no service, and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle

with the concerns of a nation? I can tell him that it is on such individuals as I that a nation has to rest, both for the hand of support and the eye of intelligence. The uninformed Mob may swell a Nation's bulk, and the titled, tinsel, courtly throng may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough in life to reason and reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court—these are a nation's strength.'

He wrote the letter, from which this is an extract, because some super-loyalists were trying to undermine his reputation on account of his independence of spirit and his democratic principles, with a view to having him removed from the paltry position he held as an Excise officer.

He was proudly, sensitively independent. He inherited his temperamental characteristics from his mother. He was happier defending others than working for himself. Writing to the Earl of Eglintoun, he said: 'Mercenary servility, I trust, I shall ever have as much honest pride as to detest.'

Writing to Mr Francis Grose, F.S.A., in 1790, about Professor Dugald Stewart, he said: 'Mr Stewart's principal characteristic is your favourite feature—that sterling in-

dependence of mind which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support.'

In 1795, the year before his death, he wrote three poems favourable to the election of Mr Heron, the Whig candidate. In the first poem he said :

The independent commoner  
Shall be the man for a' that.

Mrs Riddell, writing of Burns after his death, said : 'His features were stamped with the hardy character of independence.'

He was a democrat whose democracy was based on the rock of independence and a character that 'preserved the dignity of man with soul erect.'

Burns saw both sides of the ideal of freedom. He hated tyrants, and he despised those who tamely submitted to tyranny. The inscription on the Altar to Independence, erected by Mr Heron at Kerroughtree, written by Burns, reads :

Thou of an independent mind,  
With soul resolv'd, with soul resign'd ;  
Prepar'd Power's proudest frown to brave,  
Who wilt not be, nor have a slave ;  
Virtue alone who dost revere,



Thy own reproach alone dost fear—  
Approach this shrine, and worship here.

The man of whom Burns approved was  
‘one who wilt not *be* nor *have* a slave.’

In ‘Lines Inscribed in a Lady’s Pocket Almanac’ he says :

Deal Freedom’s sacred treasures free as air,  
Till Slave and Despot be but things that were.

In the ‘Lines on the Commemoration of Rodney’s Victory’ he wrote :

Be Anarchy cursed, and be Tyranny damned ; condemned  
And who would to Liberty e’er be disloyal  
May his son be a hangman—and he his first trial.

Burns was a philosopher whose mind had been trained to look at both sides of a question, and estimate truly their relationships to each other. Even in one of his beautiful poems to his wife, written after he was married, ‘I Hae a Wife o’ My Ain,’ he wrote :

I am naeboddy’s lord,  
I’ll be slave to naeboddy.

While Burns was an intense lover of freedom, he had no sympathy with those who would overturn constituted authority. He wished to achieve the freedom of the people, but to achieve it by constitutional means. He was a national volunteer in Dumfries,

and he composed a fine patriotic song for the corps to sing. He revealed his balanced mind in the following lines in that song :

The wretch that would a tyrant own,  
And the wretch, his true-born brother,  
Who would set the mob aboon the throne,   above  
May they be damned together.

Burns had as little respect for a king who was a tyrant, as he had for a tyrant in any other situation in life; but he clearly saw the wicked folly of allowing mob-rule to be substituted for constitutional authority.

In the Prologue written to be spoken by an actor on his benefit night, Burns wrote :

No hundred-headed Riot here we meet  
With decency and law beneath his feet ;  
Nor Insolence assumes fair Freedom's name.

Here, again, he records the dominant ideal of his mind through life ; but at the same time he utters a warning against ignorant and wild theorists, who, in their madness, would overthrow civilisation.

He overflows again on his favourite theme in the 'Lines on the Commemoration of Rodney's Victory,' when he was proposing toasts :

The next in succession I'll give you 's the King!  
Whoe'er would betray him, on high may he swing!  
And here 's the grand fabric, the free Constitution,  
As built on the base of our great Revolution.

The love of liberty grew stronger in his heart and in his mind as he grew older. In his songs, and in his letters, he frequently moralised on independence of character and the value of liberty. In a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* he said, 1795: 'I am a Briton, and must be interested in the cause of liberty.'

To Patrick Miller he sent a copy of his poems in 1793, accompanied by a letter expressing gratitude for his kindness and appreciation of him 'as a patriot who in a venal, sliding age stands forth the champion of the liberties of my country.'

In his love-song, 'Their Groves o' Sweet Myrtle,' he compares the boasted glories of tropical lands with the beauty of his beloved Scotland, and boasts in pride of the charms of the

Lone glen o' green breckan,                      ferns

Wi' the burn stealing under the lang yellow broom,  
and of the sweetness of

Yon humble broom bowers,  
Where the blue-bell and gowan lurk, lowly, unseen.

He cannot close the song, however, without claiming that beautiful as are the 'sweet-scented woodlands' of these foreign countries, they are, after all, 'the haunt of the tyrant and slave,' and that

The slave's spicy forests, and gold-bubbling fountains,  
 The brave Caledonian views wi' disdain;  
 He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains.

Burns celebrated the success of the French Revolution in a poem entitled 'The Tree of Liberty.' His heart bled for the peasantry of France, whom the aristocrats had treated so contemptuously, and with such lack of consideration, and cruelty. He rejoiced in the overthrow of their oppressors, and the establishment of a republican form of government. In this poem he gives credit to Lafayette, the great Frenchman who had gone to assist the people of the United States in their brave struggle to get free. He asks blessings on the head of the noble man, Lafayette, in the verse:

My blessings aye attend the chiel  
 Wha pitied Gallia's slaves, man,  
 And staw a branch, spite o' the deil,        stole  
 Frae yont the western waves, man.  
 Fair Virtue watered it wi' care,  
 And now she sees wi' pride, man,

How weel it buds and blossoms there,  
 Its branches spreading wide, man.

. . . . .  
 A wicked crew syne, on a time,  
 Did tak a solemn aith, man, oath  
 It ne'er should flourish to its prime,  
 I wat they pledged their faith, man.  
 Awa they gaed, wi' mock parade,<sup>4</sup>  
 Like beagles hunting game, man,  
 But soon grew weary o' the trade,  
 And wished they 'd stayed at hame, man.

Fair Freedom, standing by the tree,  
 Her sons did loudly ca', man ;  
 She sang a song o' liberty, Marseillaise  
 Which pleased them ane and a', man.  
 By her inspired, the new-born race  
 Soon drew the avenging steel, man ;  
 'The hirelings ran—her friends gied chase  
 And banged the despot weel, man.

. . . . .  
 Wi' plenty o' sic trees, I trow,  
 The world would live at peace, man ;  
 The sword would help to mak' a plough ;  
 The din o' war wad cease, man.

The greatest poem Burns wrote to rejoice at the victorious progress of humanity towards freedom was his 'Ode to Liberty,' written to express his supreme gratification at the success of the people of the United States in their struggle for independence from England.

He wrote it, as he wrote most of his poems during his life in Dumfries, in the moonlight in Lincluden Abbey ruins, on the Nith River, just outside of Dumfries. He introduces the ode in a poem named 'A Vision.'

He tells that, at midnight, while in the ruins, he saw in the roofless tower of the abbey, a vision :

By heedless chance I turned my eyes,  
And, by the moonbeam, shook to see  
A stern and stalwart ghaist arise, ghost  
Attired as minstrels wont to be.

Had I a statue been o' stane,  
His daring look had daunted me ;  
And on his bonnet graved was plain,  
'The sacred posy, 'Libertie.'

And frae his harp sic strains did flow  
Might rouse the slumbering dead to hear ;  
But oh ! it was a tale of woe,  
As ever met a Briton's ear !

The ghost tells the story of the tyranny England exercised over the people of the United States, and of the breaking of the tyrant's chains. Burns had no more respect for despotism by an English king than he had for the despotism of a tyrant in any other land. He knew the people of the American colonies were right. England's greatest



statesman, Pitt, had said so, when the colonists, driven to desperation, rebelled; so the ghost's revelation should be to a liberty-loving Briton's ear 'a tale of woe.'

The ode begins:

No Spartan tube, no Attic shell,

No lyre Æolian I awake;

'Tis liberty's bold note I swell;

Thy harp, Columbia, let me take!

See gathering thousands, while I sing,

A broken chain exultant bring,

And dash it in the tyrant's face,

And dare him to his very beard,

And tell him he no more is feared—

No more the despot of Columbia's race!

A tyrant's proudest insults braved,

They shout—a People freed! They hail an Empire  
saved.

. . . . .

But come, ye sons of Liberty,

Columbia's offspring, brave and free.

In danger's hour still flaming in the van,

Ye know and dare maintain 'the Royalty of Man.'

So the poem proceeds, till he appeals to King Alfred, and finally to Caledonia:

Alfred! on thy starry throne,

Surrounded by the tuneful choir,

The bards that erst have struck the patriotic lyre,

And rous'd the freeborn Briton's soul of fire,

No more thy England own!

Dare injured nations form the great design,  
To make detested tyrants bleed ?  
Thy England execrates the glorious deed !  
Beneath her hostile banners waving,  
Every pang of honour braving,  
England, in thunder calls, 'The tyrant's cause is mine !'  
That hour accurst how did the fiends rejoice,  
And hell, through all her confines, raise the exulting  
voice !  
That hour which saw the generous English name  
Linkt with such damned deeds of everlasting shame !

Thee, Caledonia ! thy wild heaths among,  
Fam'd for the martial deed, the heaven-taught song,  
To thee I turn with swimming eyes ;  
Where is that soul of Freedom fled ?  
Immingled with the mighty dead,  
Beneath that hallow'd turf where Wallace lies !  
Hear it not, Wallace ! in thy bed of death.  
Ye babbling winds ! in silence sweep,  
Disturb not ye the hero's sleep,  
Nor give the coward secret breath.  
Is this the ancient Caledonian form,  
Firm as the rock, resistless as the storm ?

He loved to stir the liberty-loving spirit  
of his beloved Caledonia, so to her sons  
he makes the final appeal in his great ode.  
He wrote in a similar strain in the Pro-  
logue written for his friend Woods, the  
actor :

O Thou dread Power ! whose empire-giving hand  
Has oft been stretched to shield the honoured land !  
Strong may she glow with all her ancient fire !  
May every son be worthy of his sire !  
Firm may she rise with generous disdain  
At Tyranny's, or direr Pleasure's, chain ;  
Still self-dependent in her native shore,  
Bold may she brave grim Danger's loudest roar,  
Till fate the curtain drop on worlds to be no more.

He reached the highest degree of patriotic fervour, and his clearest call, not only to Scotsmen, but to all true men, to be ready to do their duty for justice and liberty, in 'Bruce's Address at Bannockburn.'

In a letter to the Earl of Buchan, 1794, enclosing a copy of this poem, he wrote: 'Independent of my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with anything in history which interests my feelings as a man equal with the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand a cruel, but able, usurper, leading on the finest army in Europe, to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly daring and greatly injured people; on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation, devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country or perish with her. Liberty ! thou art a prize truly and indeed invaluable, for never canst thou be too dearly bought.'

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,  
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,  
Welcome to your gory bed,  
Or to Victorie !  
Now 's the day and now 's the hour ;  
See the front o' battle lour !  
See approach proud Edward's power—  
Chains and slaverie !

Wha will be a traitor knave ?  
Wha can fill a coward's grave ?  
Wha sae base as be a slave ?  
Let him turn and flee !  
Wha for Scotland's King and Law,  
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,  
Free-Man stand, or Free-Man fa' ?  
Let him follow me !

By Oppression's woes and pains !  
By your Sons in servile chains !  
We will drain our dearest veins,  
But they *shall* be free !  
Lay the proud Usurpers low !  
Tyrants fall in every foe !  
Liberty 's in every blow !  
Let us Do—or Die

‘So may God ever defend the cause of Truth  
and Liberty as he did that day.

‘ROBERT BURNS.’

Because he was so outspoken in regard to

democracy, some men assumed he was not a loyal man. The truth is, that he always loved his country, but he ardently desired to improve the conditions of the great body of his countrymen. Complaints were made about his disloyalty to the Excise commissioners under whom he worked. These complaints were investigated, and Burns was found to be a loyal man.

When the call came from the Government for volunteers, Burns joined the Dumfries Volunteers. In his great song composed for these volunteers he strongly expresses his loyalty, both to his country and to his king, in the following quotations :

We'll ne'er permit a foreign foe  
On British ground to rally.

Be Britain still to Britain true,  
Amang oursels united ;  
For never but by British hands  
Maun British wrangs be righted. must

Who will not sing 'God save the King,'  
Shall hang as high's the steeple !  
But while we sing 'God save the King,'  
We'll ne'er forget the people.

To Robert Graham of Fintry, 1792, he wrote : 'To the British Constitution on re-

volution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached.'

Again, a month later, he wrote to Mr Graham: 'I never uttered any invectives against the King. His private worth it is altogether impossible that such a man as I can appreciate; but in his public capacity I always revered, and always will, with the soundest loyalty, revere the Monarch of Great Britain as (to speak in Masonic) the sacred Keystone of our Royal Arch Constitution. As to reform principles, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious Constitution on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame.

. . . . .  
'I never dictated to, corresponded with, or had the least connection with, any political association whatever—except that when the magistrates and principal inhabitants of Dumfries met to declare their attachment to the Constitution, and their abhorrence of riot.'

He had strong desires to effect many reforms in public life, but he was an intelligent believer in the British Constitution, and had no faith in any method of achieving reforms in the Empire except by constitutional



measures. He was a radical reformer with a grand mental balance-wheel; and such reformers make the best type of citizens, ardent reformers with cool heads and unselfish hearts.

Carlyle strangely misunderstood the spirit of democracy in Burns, although he justly wrote, long after the poet's death: 'He appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century.'

What were the achievements, in addition to his poetic power, that made Burns 'one of the most considerable men of the eighteenth century?' Mainly the work he did to develop in the souls of men a consciousness of fundamental principles of democracy, and higher ideals of vital religion; yet Carlyle does not approve of his efforts to reform either social or religious conditions. As the centuries pass, the work of Burns for Religion, Democracy, and Brotherhood will be recognised as his greatest work for humanity.

Carlyle's belief was that Burns wrote about the wrongs of the oppressed because he could not become rich. In that belief he was clearly in error. The love of freedom, justice, and independence was a basic passion in the

character of Burns. The anxiety of Burns regarding money was not for himself, but for his family in case he should die. Several times he referred to this in letters to his most intimate friends.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BURNS AND BROTHERHOOD.

IN the third letter Burns wrote Alison Begbie, the first woman he asked to marry him, he said: 'I grasp every creature in the arms of Universal Benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathise with the miseries of the unfortunate.'

This statement of one of the fundamental principles which guided him during his whole life is a profound interpretation of the teachings of Christ in regard to the attitude that each individual should have, must have, in order that brotherhood may be established on the earth. He taught universal benevolence and vital sympathy *with*—not *for*—humanity; not merely when sorrows and afflictions bring dark clouds to hearts, but in times of happiness and rejoicing; affectionate sympathy, unostentatious sympathy, co-operative sympathy that stimulates helpfulness and hopefulness; sympathy that produces activity of

the divine in the human heart and mind, and leads to brotherhood.

The amazing fact is, not that Burns wrote such fundamental Christian philosophy in a love-letter, but that a youth of twenty-one could think it and express it so perfectly.

To Clarinda he wrote, 1787: 'Lord! why was I born to see misery which I cannot relieve?'

Again, in 1788, he wrote to her: 'Give me to feel "another's woe," and continue with me that dear-loved friend that feels with mine.'

To Mrs Walter Riddell he wrote, 1793: 'Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of Nature, by far the most enviable is to be able "to wipe away all tears from all eyes." O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent mausoleums, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor, honest heart happy.'

In 'A Winter Night,' the great poem of universal sympathy, he says:

Affliction's sons are brothers in distress;  
A brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss.

He closes the poem with four great lines:

But deep this truth impressed my mind—  
Thro' all His works abroad,  
The heart benevolent and kind  
The most resembles God.

In the same poem he paints the characters who lack loving sympathy, and whose lives and attitudes towards their fellow-men separate men, and break the ties that should unite all men, and thus prevent the development of the spirit of brotherhood. After describing the fierceness of the storm and expressing his heartfelt sympathy for the cattle, the sheep, the birds, and even with destructive animals such as prey on hen-roosts or defenceless lambs, his mind was filled with a plaintive strain, as he thought of the bitterness of man to his brother man, and he proceeds :

Blow, blow, ye winds, with heavier gust !  
And freeze, thou bitter-biting frost !  
Descend, ye chilly, smothering snows !  
Not all your rage, as now united, shows  
More hard unkindness, unrelenting,  
Vengeful malice unrepenting,  
Than heaven-illumined man on brother man bestows.

The depth and universality of his sympathy is shown in 'To a Mouse,' after he had destroyed its nest while ploughing :

I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,  
An' fellow-mortal !

In his 'Epistle to Davie,' a brother poet, he emphasises the value of true sympathy, that should bind all hearts, must yet bind all hearts in universal brotherhood, when he says :

All hail ! ye tender feelings dear !  
The smile of love, the friendly tear,  
The sympathetic glow !  
Long since, this world's thorny ways  
Had numbered out my weary days,  
Had it not been for you.

In his 'Epistle to Robert Graham of Fintry,' after describing the thrifty but selfishly prudent, 'who feel by reason and who give by rule,' and expressing regret that 'the friendly e'er should want a friend,' he writes :

But come ye, who the godlike pleasure know,  
Heaven's attribute distinguished—to bestow !  
Whose arms of love would grasp the human race.

In the opinion of Burns, they are the ideal men and women who best understood, and



most perfectly practised, the teaching of Christ.

In one of his epistles to his friend Lapraik he says :

For thus the royal mandate ran,  
When first the human race began :  
The social, friendly, honest man,  
    Whate'er he be—  
'Tis *he* fulfils great Nature's plan,  
    And none but he.

The influence of any act on society, on the brotherhood of man as a whole, was the supreme test of Burns to distinguish between goodness and evil.

To Dr Moore, of London, he said : ' Whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by His creatures with thankful delight.'

To Clarinda he wrote : ' Thou Almighty Author of peace, and goodness, and love ! Do thou give me the social heart that kindly tastes of every man's cup ! Is it a draught of joy ? Warm and open my heart to share it with cordial, unenvying rejoicing ! Is it the bitter potion of sorrow ? Melt my heart with sincerely sympathetic woe ! Above all, do Thou give me the manly mind, that

resolutely exemplifies in life and manners those sentiments which I would wish to be thought to possess.'

In 'On the Seas and Far Away' he says:

Peace, thy olive wand extend,  
And bid wild war his ravage end;  
Man with brother man to meet,  
And as a brother kindly greet.

In the 'Tree of Liberty' he says, if we had plenty of the trees of Liberty growing throughout the whole world:

Like brothers in a common cause  
We'd on each other smile, man;  
And equal rights and equal laws  
Wad gladden ev'ry isle, man.

To Clarinda, when he presented a pair of wine-glasses—a perfectly proper gift to a lady in the opinion of his time—he gave her at the same time a poem, in which he said:

And fill them high with generous juice,  
As generous as your mind;  
And pledge them to the generous toast,  
'The whole of human kind!'

In his 'Epistle to John Lapraik,' after describing those whose lives do not help men towards brotherhood, he describes those who are true to the great ideal:

But ye whom social pleasure charms,  
Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,  
Who hold your being on the terms,  
    ‘Each aid the others,’  
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,  
    My friends, my brothers.

Burns gives each man the true test of the influence of his life for the promotion of true brotherhood in the short line, ‘Each aid the others.’ That line is the supreme test of duty, and is the highest interpretation of Christ’s commandment to His disciples, and through them to all men, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you.’ Vital love means vital helpfulness.

Dickens gives the same great message as Burns when, in describing Little Dorritt, he says: ‘She was something different from the rest, and she was that something for the rest.’ This is probably the shortest sentence ever written that conveys so clearly the two great revelations of Christ: Individuality and Brotherhood.

There are some who dislike the expression ‘Come to my bowl.’ They should test Burns by the accepted standards of his time, not by the standards of our time. The bowl was the symbol of true comradeship in castle and cot, in the manse and in the layman’s home, in the time of Burns.

No other writer has interpreted Christ's revelations of Democracy and Brotherhood so clearly and so fully as Robert Burns. He sums up the whole matter of man's relationship to man in 'A Man's a Man for a' That,' in the last verse :

Then let us pray that come it may—  
As come it will for a' that—  
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,  
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.      pre-eminence  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's coming yet, for a' that,  
That man to man the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be for a' that.

He revealed his supreme purpose in 'A Revolutionary Lyric':

In virtue trained, enlightened youth  
Will love each fellow-creature ;  
And future years shall prove the truth—  
That man is good by nature.

The golden age will then revive ;  
Each man will love his brother ;  
In harmony we all shall live,  
And share the earth together.

While the so-called religious teachers of the time of Burns were dividing men into creeds based on petty theological distinctions, Burns

was interpreting for humanity the highest teachings of Christ: Democracy based on recognition of the value of the individual soul, and Brotherhood as the natural fruit of true democracy.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BURNS A REVEALER OF PURE LOVE.

MANY people yet believe that Burns was a universal and inconstant lover. He really did not love many women. He loved deeply, but he had not a great many really serious experiences of love. He loved Nellie Kirkpatrick when he was fifteen, and Peggy Thomson when he was seventeen. He says his love of Nellie made him a poet. There is no other experience that will kindle the strongest element in a human soul during the adolescent period so fully, and so permanently, as genuine love. Love will not make all young people poets, but it will kindle with its most developing glow whatever is the strongest natural power in each individual soul. Parents should foster such love in young people during the adolescent period, instead of ridiculing it, as is too often done. God may not mean that the love is to be permanent, but there is no other agency that can be so productive at the time of adolescence as love that is revered by



parents who, by due reverence, sympathy, and comradeship, help love to do its best work.

These two adolescent loves did their work in developing Burns, but they were not loves of maturity. From seventeen till he was twenty-one he was not really in love. Then he met, and deeply and reverently loved, Alison Begbie. She was a servant girl of charm, sweetness, and dignity, in a home not far from Lochlea farm. He wrote three poems to her: 'The Lass o' Cessnock Banks,' 'Peggy Alison,' and 'Mary Morrison.' He reversed her name for the second title, because it possessed neither the elements of metre nor of rhyme. He gave his third poem to her the title 'Mary Morrison' to make it conform to the same metre as 'Peggy Alison.' There was a Mary Morrison who was nine years of age when Burns wrote 'Mary Morrison.' She is buried in Mauchline Churchyard, and on her tombstone it is stated that she was 'the Mary Morrison of Burns.' His brother Gilbert knew better. He said the poem was written to the lady to whom 'Peggy Alison' was written. It is impossible to believe that Burns would write 'Mary Morrison' to a child only nine years old.

Burns wrote five love-letters to Alison Begbie.

Beautiful and reverent letters they were, too. In the fourth, he asked her to become his wife. In Chapter III. it has been explained that he was too shy, even at twenty-two, to ask the woman whom he loved to marry him when he was with her. This does not indicate that he had a new love each week, as many yet believe. Miss Begbie refused to marry him, and his reply should win him the respect of every reasonable man or woman who reads it. It is the dignified and reverent outpouring of a loving heart, held in control by a well-balanced and considerate mind.

Although Burns had no lover from seventeen to twenty-one years of age, he wrote love-songs during those years, but even his mother could not tell the name of any young woman who kindled his muse during these four years. Neither could the other members of his family.

He wrote one poem, 'My Nannie O,' during this period. He first wrote for the first line :

Beyond the hills where Stinchar flows.

He did not like the word 'Stinchar,' so he changed it to 'Lugar,' a much more euphonious word. He had no lover named 'Nannie.'

Lugar and Stinchar were several miles apart. He was really writing about love, not the love of any one woman, during those four years; and he was writing about other great subjects more than about love, mainly religious and ethical ideals.

From the age of twenty-two he was for three years without a lover. At twenty-five he met Jean Armour, then eighteen. Jean spoke first to the respectfully shy man. At the annual dance on Fair night in Mauchline, Burns was one of the young men who were present. His dog, Luath, who loved him, and whom he loved in return, traced his master upstairs to the dance hall. Of course the dance was interrupted when Luath got on the floor and found his master. Burns kindly led the dog out, and as he was going he said, 'I wish I could find a lassie to loe me as well as my dog.' A short time afterwards Burns was going along a street in Mauchline, and was passing Jean Armour without speaking to her, because he had not been introduced to her. She was at the village pump getting water to sprinkle her clothes on the village green, and as he was passing her she asked, 'Hae you found a lassie yet to loe you as well as your dog?' Burns then stopped and conversed with her. She was a handsome,

bright young woman. Their acquaintance soon developed a strong love between them, and resulted in a test of the real manhood of the character of Burns. When he realised that Jean was to become a mother, he did not hesitate as to his duty. He gave her a legal certificate of marriage, signed by himself and regularly witnessed, which was as valid as a marriage certificate of a clergyman or a magistrate in Scottish law.

Jean's father compelled her to destroy, or let him destroy, the certificate. 'This, and her father's threatened legal prosecution, nearly upset the mind of Burns. He undoubtedly loved Jean Armour. In a letter written at the time to David Brice, a friend in Glasgow, he wrote: 'Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her; and, to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all. . . . May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may His grace be with her, and bless her in all her future life.'

He had arranged to leave Scotland for Jamaica to escape from his mental torture, when two things came into his life: Mary Campbell, and the suggestion that he should

publish his poems. The first filled his heart, the second gave him the best tonic for his mind—deeply and joyously interesting occupation.

Mary Campbell, ‘Highland Mary,’ he had met when she was a nursemaid in the home of his friend Gavin Hamilton. Meeting her again, when she was a servant in Montgomery Castle, he became acquainted with her, and they soon loved each other. It is not remarkable that Burns should love Mary Campbell, because she was a winsome, quiet, refined young woman, and his heart was desolate at the loss of Jean Armour. He, at the time he made love to Mary, had no hope of reconciliation with Jean. The greater his love for Jean had been, and still was, the greater his need was for another love to fill his heart, and he found a pure and satisfying lover in Mary. Their love was deep and short, lasting only about two months. Two busy months they were, as Burns was preparing his poems for the Kilmarnock edition, till he and Mary agreed to be married. They parted for the last time on 14th May 1785. The day was Sunday. They spent the afternoon in the fine park of Montgomery Castle, through which the Fail River runs for a mile and a half. In the evening they went out of the

grounds about half a mile to Failford, a little village at the junction of the Fail with the Ayr. The Fail runs parallel to the Ayr, and in the opposite direction after leaving the castle grounds, until it reaches Failford. There it meets a solid rock formation, which compels it to turn squarely to the right and flow into the Ayr, about three hundred yards away. At a narrow place where the Fail had cut a passage through the soft rock on its way to the Ayr, Burns and Highland Mary parted. He stood on one side of the river and Mary on the other, and after they had exchanged Bibles, they made their vows of intention to marry, he holding one side of an open Bible and she the other side. Mary went home to prepare for her marriage, but a relative in Greenock fell ill with malignant fever, and Mary went to nurse him, and caught the fever herself and died.

The poems he wrote to her and about her made her a renowned character. When in 1919 a shipbuilding company at Greenock, after a four years' struggle, finally purchased the church and churchyard in which Mary was buried, with the intention of removing the bodies to another place, the British Parliament passed an Act providing that her monument must stand forever over her grave,



where it had always stood.\* Though she held a humble position, the beautiful poems of her lover gave her an honoured place in the hearts of millions of people all over the world.

Burns did not go to Jamaica, although he had secured a berth on a ship to take him to that beautiful island. Calls came to him just in time to publish an edition of his poems in Edinburgh. He answered the calls, startled and delighted Edinburgh society, published his poems, and met Clarinda.

Mrs M'Lehose was a cultured and charming grass-widow. She had been courted and married by a wealthy young man in Glasgow when she was only seventeen years of age. Though a lady of the highest character, on the advice of relatives and friends she left her husband. He then went to Jamaica.

Burns and Mrs M'Lehose mutually admired each other when they met, and their friendship quickly developed into affection. Under the names of Sylvander and Clarinda they conducted a love correspondence which will probably always remain the finest love correspondence of the ages. Clarinda was a religious and cultured woman; Burns was a religious

\* The lovers of Burns afterwards got permission to remove the monument and remains of Highland Mary to a more suitable location.



and cultured man, so their letters of love are on a high plane. Clarinda wrote very good poems as well as good prose, and Burns wrote some of his best poems to Clarinda. His parting song to Clarinda is, in the opinion of many literary men, the greatest love-song of its kind ever written. Those who study the Clarinda correspondence will find not only love, but many interesting philosophical discussions regarding religion and human life.

Thus ends the record of his real loves, notwithstanding the outrageous misstatements that his loves extended, according to one writer, to nearly four hundred. He had just four deep and serious loves, not counting the two deep and transforming affections of his adolescent period for Nellie Kirkpatrick and Peggy Thomson. He loved four women: Alison Begbie, Jean Armour, Mary Campbell, and Mrs M'Lehose. At the age of twenty-one he loved Alison Begbie, and, when twenty-two, he asked her to marry him. She declined his proposal. He was too shy to propose to her when he was with her. Get this undoubted fact into your consciousness, and think about it fairly and reasonably, and it will help you to get a truer vision of the real Burns. Read the proposal and his subsequent letter on pages 51-55, and your mind

should form juster conceptions of Burns as a lover and as a man. You will find it harder to be misled by the foolish or the malicious misrepresentations that have too long passed as facts concerning him as a lover.

From twenty-two to twenty-five he had no lover; then he loved and married Jean Armour. No act of his prevented that marriage-contract remaining in force. When her father forced the destruction of the contract, and much against his will, and in defiance of the love of his heart, he found that he had lost his wife beyond any reasonable hope of reconciliation and reunion, and was therefore free to love another, he loved Mary Campbell, and honourably proposed marriage to her. She accepted his offer, but died soon after. He was untrue to no one when he took Clarinda into his heart. Of course he could not ask her to marry him, as she was already married.

The first three women he loved after he reached the age of twenty-one years were Alison Begbie, Jean Armour, and Mary Campbell. The first refused his offer; he married the second, and was forced into freedom by her father; the third accepted his offer of marriage, but died before they could be married. The fourth woman whom he loved

loved him, but could not marry him, a fact recognised by both of them. There is not a shadow of evidence of inconstancy or unfaithfulness on his part in the eight years during which he loved the four women—the only four he did love after he became a man.

It may be answered that Burns was not loyal to Jean Armour because he loved Mary Campbell and Clarinda after he was married to Jean. Burns absolutely believed that his marriage to Jean was annulled by the burning of the marriage certificate. He would not have pledged matrimony with Mary Campbell if he had known that Jean was still his wife. When Mary died, and he found Jean's father was willing that he might again marry Jean, he did marry her in Gavin Hamilton's home. In writing to Clarinda he forgot himself for a moment and spoke disrespectfully of Jean, but his prompt and honourable action in marrying her soon after showed him to be a true man.

It should ever be remembered that Burns was in no sense a fickle lover. To each of the three women whom he loved, his love was reverent and true. He had a reverent affection for Alison Begbie after she refused him; he loved Jean Armour after she allowed their marriage-certificate to be destroyed; and

he loved Mary Campbell, not only till she died, but to the end of his life. The fact that he sat out in the stackyard on Ellisland farm through the long moonlit night, with tears flowing down his cheeks, on the third anniversary of her death, and wrote 'To Mary in Heaven,' proves the depth and permanency of his love.

In 'My Eppie Adair' he says :

By love and by beauty, by law and by duty,  
I swear to be true to my Eppie Adair.

In these lines Burns truly defines his own type of love.

It is true that Miss Margaret Chalmers told the poet Campbell, after Burns died, that he had asked her to marry him. His letters to her are letters of deep friendship—reverent friendship—not love. It is true that the last poem he ever wrote was written to Margaret Chalmers, and that in it he said :

Full well thou knowest I love thee, dear.

But it must be remembered that Burns had been married to Jean and living happily with her for eight years, so the love of this line was not the love that is expected to lead to marriage, but an expression of reverent affection. The whole tenor of this last poem

of his life indicates that he thought her feeling for him was cooling, and his deep affectionate friendship urged him to plead with her for a continuance of their long-existing and quite unusual relationship.

Many people will doubtless say, 'What about Chloris?' Chloris was his name for Jean Lorimer, the daughter of a friend of his who dwelt near him when he lived on Ellisland farm after his second marriage to Jean Armour. Chloris was a sweet singer and player, who frequently visited Mrs Burns, and who sang for Burns, sometimes, with Mrs Burns the grand old Scottish airs that had long been sung to words that were not pure, and to which he was writing new and pure words nearly every day. A number of these songs were addressed to Chloris, but in a book of his poems presented to Miss Lorimer he states clearly that the love he appeared to be expressing for her was an assumed, or, as he called it, a 'fictitious,' and not a real love.

When Burns had earned five hundred pounds by the sale of the Edinburgh edition of his poems, he decided 'that he had the responsibility for the temporal and possibly the eternal welfare of a dearly loved fellow-creature;' so again giving proof of his honest manhood and recognising his plain duty, he

married Jean Armour a second time, in the home of his dear friend Gavin Hamilton. Of the first three women whom he loved one refused him, one died after their sacred engagement, and the third he married twice. The fourth and last woman that he loved could not marry.

Any one of the first three would have made him a good wife, but no one could have been more considerate or more faithful than the one he married.

Could any reasonable man believe that if Burns had really loved other women, as he loved Alison Begbie, Jean Armour, Mary Campbell, and Mrs M'Lehose, the names of the other women would not have been known by the world? He never tried to hide his love. He wrote songs of love with other names attached to them, used for variety. In a letter to a friend he regretted the use of 'Chloris' in several of his Ellisland and Dumfries poems, and to her directly he said they were 'fictitious' or assumed expressions of love. Notwithstanding the foolish or malicious statements that Burns had many lovers, he had but four real loves. One would have been his limit if the first had accepted him and lived as long as he did.

It has been said that 'the love of Burns



was the love of the flesh.' It is worth while to examine the love-songs of Burns to learn what elements of thought and feeling dominated his mind and heart. He wrote two hundred and fifty love-songs, and only three or four contain indelicate references; even these were not considered improper in his time.

What were the themes of his love-songs? What were the symbols that he used to typify love? There is no beauty or delight in Nature on earth or sky that he did not use as a symbol of true love. He saw God through Nature as few men ever saw Him, and he therefore naturally used the beauty and sweetness and glory of Nature to help to reveal the beauty and sweetness and glory of love, the element of the Divine that thrilled him with the deepest joy and the highest reverence.

In his first poem, written when he was fifteen, describing his fourteen-year-old sweetheart, he says :

A bonnie lass, I will confess,  
Is pleasant to the e'e;  
But without some better qualities,  
She 's no a lass for me.

But it 's innocence and modesty  
That polishes the dart.



'Tis this in Nelly pleases me,  
 'Tis this enchants my soul ;  
 For absolutely in my breast  
 She reigns without control.

Of Peggy Thomson, his second love, he wrote :

Not vernal showers to budding flowers,  
 Not autumn to the farmer,  
 So dear can be as thou to me,  
 My fair, my lovely charmer.

Of Alison Begbie he wrote in 'The Lass o' Cessnock Banks' :

But it's not her air, her form, her face,  
 Tho' matching beauty's fabled queen ;  
 'Tis the mind that shines in ev'ry grace,  
 And chiefly in her rogueish een,

In 'Young Peggy Blooms' he describes her :

Young Peggy blooms our bonniest lass,  
 Her blush is like the morning,  
 The rosy dawn, the springing grass  
 With early gems adorning.  
 Her eyes outshine the radiant beams  
 That gild the passing shower,  
 And glitter o'er the crystal streams,  
 And cheer each fresh'ning flower.

In 'Will Ye Go to the Indies, My Mary?' he says :

O sweet grows the lime and the orange,  
 And the apple o' the pine ;  
 But a' the charms o' the Indies  
 Can never equal thine.

The following are emblems of beauty in  
 the 'Lass o' Ballochmyle':

On every blade the pearls hang.  
 Her look was like the morning's eye,  
 Her air like Nature's vernal smile.  
 Fair is the morn in flowery May,  
 And sweet is night in autumn mild.

Describing 'My Nannie O' he says :

Her face is fair, her heart is true ;  
 As spotless as she's bonnie, O ;  
 The opening gowan, wat wi' dew,                      daisy  
 Nae purer is than Nannie O.

In 'The Birks [birches] of Aberfeldy' he speaks to his lover of 'Summer blinking on flowery braes' and 'Playing o'er the crystal streamlets ;' and the 'Blythe singing o' the little birdies' and 'The braes o'erhung wi' fragrant woods' and 'The hoary cliffs crowned wi' flowers ;' and 'The streamlet pouring over a waterfall.' Love and Nature were united in his heart.

In 'Blythe was She' he describes the lady by saying she was like beautiful things :

Her looks were like a flower in May ,

Her smile was like a simmer morn ;

Her bonnie face it was as meek  
As any lamb upon a lea ;

and ‘the ev’ning sun.’

Her step was

As light ’s a bird upon a thorn.

He wrote ‘O’ a’ the Airts the Wind can  
Blaw’ about Jean Armour after they were  
married, while he was building their home  
on Ellisland. He says in this exquisite  
song :

By day and night my fancy’s flight  
Is ever wi’ my Jean.

I see her in the dewy flowers,

I see her sweet and fair ;

I hear her in the tunefu’ birds,

I hear her charm the air :

There ’s not a bonnie flower that springs

By fountain, shaw, or green ;                      woodland

There ’s not a bonnie bird that sings,

But minds me o’ my Jean.

To Jean he wrote again :

It is na, Jean, thy bonnie face,  
Nor shape that I admire ;

Although thy beauty and thy grace  
 Might weel awake desire.  
 Something in ilka part o' thee  
 To praise, to love, I find ;  
 But dear as is thy form to me,  
 Still dearer is thy mind.

In 'Delia—an Ode,' he uses the 'fair face of orient day,' and 'the tints of the opening rose' to suggest her beauty, and 'the lark's wild warbled lay' and the 'sweet sound of the tinkling rill' to suggest the sweetness of her voice.

In 'I Gaed a Waefu' Gate Yestreen' he says :

She talked, she smiled, my heart she wiled ;  
 She charmed my *soul*, I wist na how.

It was the soul of Burns that responded to love. Neither Alison Begbie nor Mary Campbell excelled in beauty, and no one acquainted with their high character could have had the temerity to suggest that love for them was 'the love of the flesh.' His beautiful poems to Jean Armour place his love for her on a high plane. He was a man of strong passion, but passion was not the source of his love.

In 'Aye sae Bonnie, Blythe and Gay' he says :

She 's aye sae neat, sae trim, sae light, the graces round  
 her hover,  
 Ae look deprived me o' my heart, and I became her  
 lover

‘Ilka bird sang o’ its love’ he makes Miss Kennedy say in ‘The Banks o’ Doon.’ As the birds ever sang love to Burns, he naturally makes them sing love to all hearts.

In ‘The Bonnie Wee Thing’ he gives high qualifications for love kindling :

Wit, and grace, and love, and beauty  
 In ae constellation shine ;  
 To adore thee is my duty,  
 Goddess o’ this soul o’ mine.

In ‘The Charms of Lovely Davies’ he says :

Each eye it cheers when she appears,  
 Like Phœbus in the morning,  
 When past the shower, and ev’ry flower  
 The garden is adorning.

The last three poems from which quotations have been made were written about two ladies whose lovers had been untrue to them : the first about Miss Kennedy, a member of one of the leading Ayrshire families ; the other two about Miss Davies, a relative of the Glenriddell family.

In a letter to Miss Davies he said :

‘Woman is the blood-royal of life ; let there be slight degrees of precedency among them, but let them all be sacred. Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable ; it is an original component feature of my mind.’

Burns was not in love with either Miss Kennedy or Miss Davies, but he explains the writing of the songs to Miss Davies, in a letter enclosing ‘Bonnie Wee Thing,’ by saying, ‘When I meet a person of my own heart I positively can no more desist from rhyming on impulse than an *Æolian* harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air.’

One of his most beautiful poems is ‘The Posie,’ which he planned to pull for his ‘Ain dear May.’

The primrose I will pu’, the firstling o’ the year,  
And I will pu’ the pink, the emblem o’ my dear,  
For she’s the pink o’ womankind, and blooms without  
a peer.

I’ll pu’ the budding rose, when Phœbus peeps in view,  
For it’s like a baumy kiss o’ her sweet, bonnie mou’ ;  
The hyacinth’s for constancy, wi’ its unchanging blue.

The lily it is pure, and the lily it is fair,  
And in her lovely bosom I’ll place the lily there ;  
The daisy’s for simplicity and unaffected air,

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The woodbine I will pu', when the e'ening star is near,  
And the diamond draps o' dew shall be her een sae  
clear ;

The violet 's for modesty, which weel she fa's to wear.

I 'll tie the posie round wi' the silken band o' luve,  
And I 'll place it in her breast, and I 'll swear by a'  
above

That to my latest draught o' life the band shall ne'er  
remove,

And this will be a posie to my ain dear May.

In 'Lovely Polly Stewart' he says :

O lovely Polly Stewart,

O charming Polly Stewart,

There 's ne'er a flower that blooms in May

That 's half so fair as thou art.

The flower it blaws, it fades, it fa's,

And art can ne'er renew it ;

But worth and truth, eternal youth

Will gie to Polly Stewart.

In 'Thou Fair Eliza' he says :

Not the bee upon the blossom,

In the pride o' sinny noon ;

Not the little sporting fairy,

All beneath the simmer moon ;

Not the minstrel, in the moment

Fancy lightens in his e'e,



Kens the pleasure, feels the rapture,  
That thy presence gies to me.

In 'My Bonie Bell' he writes :

The smiling spring comes in rejoicing,  
The surly winter grimly flies ;  
Now crystal clear are the falling waters,  
And bonie blue are the sunny skies.  
Fresh o'er the mountains breaks forth the morning,  
The evening gilds the ocean's swell ;  
All creatures joy in the sun's returning,  
And I rejoice in my Bonie Bell.

'Sweet Afton' was suggested by the following: 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not, nor awaken my love—my dove, my undefiled! The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.'

In descriptive power and in fond and reverent love no poem of Burns, or any other writer, surpasses *Sweet Afton*. Authorities have been divided in regard to the person who was the Mary of *Sweet Afton*. Currie and Lockhart declined to accept the statement of Gilbert Burns that it was Highland Mary. Chambers and Douglas, the most illuminating and reliable of the early biographers of Burns, agree with Gilbert. One

of Mrs Dunlop's daughters stated that she heard Burns himself say that Mary Campbell was the woman whose name he used to represent the lover for whom he asked such reverent consideration. He had no lover at any period of his life on the Afton. He had but one lover named Mary, and she stirred him to a degree of reverence that toned the music of his love to the end of his life. Mary Campbell was alive to Burns in a truly realistic sense when he wrote the sacred poem 'Sweet Afton.'

In 'O were my Love yon Lilac Fair' he assumes that his love might be

A lilac fair,  
Wi' purpling blossoms in the spring,  
And I a bird to shelter there,  
When wearied on my little wing.

In the second verse he says :

O gin my love were yon red rose if  
That grows upon the castle wa';  
And I mysel' a drop o' dew,  
Into her bonie breast to fa'!

Could imagination kindle more pure ideals to reveal love than these? In 'Bonie Jean—A Ballad' he gives two delightful pictures of love;

As in the bosom of the stream  
 The moonbeam dwells at dewy e'en ;  
 So trembling, pure, was tender love  
 Within the breast of Bonie Jean.

. . . . .

The sun was sinking in the west,  
 The birds sang sweet in ilka grove ;      every  
 His cheek to hers he fondly laid,  
 And whispered thus his tale of love.

In 'Phillis the Fair' he writes :

While larks, with little wing, fann'd the pure air,  
 Tasting the breathing spring, forth did I fare ;  
 Gay the sun's golden eye  
 Peep'd o'er the mountains high ;  
 Such thy morn ! did I cry, Phillis the fair.

In each bird's careless song glad did I share ;  
 While yon wild-flow'rs among, chance led me there !  
 Sweet to the op'ning day,  
 Rosebuds bent the dewy spray ;  
 Such thy bloom ! did I say, Phillis the fair.

In 'By Allan Stream' he describes the glories  
 of Nature, but gives them second place to  
 the joys of love :

The haunt o' spring 's the primrose-brae,  
 The summer joys the flocks to follow ;

How cheery thro' her short'ning day  
 Is autumn in her weeds o' yellow ;  
 But can they melt the glowing heart,  
 Or chain the soul in speechless pleasure ?  
 Or thro' each nerve the rapture dart,  
 Like meeting her, our bosom's treasure ?

In 'Phillis, the Queen o' the Fair' he  
 uses many beautiful things to illustrate her  
 charms :

The daisy amused my fond fancy,  
 So artless, so simple, so wild :  
 Thou emblem, said I, o' my Phillis—  
 For she is Simplicity's child.

The rosebud 's the blush o' my charmer,  
 Her sweet, balmy lip when 'tis prest :  
 How fair and how pure is the lily !  
 But fairer and purer her breast.

Yon knot of gay flowers in the harbour,  
 They ne'er wi' my Phillis can vie :  
 Her breath is the breath of the woodbine,  
 Its dew-drop o' diamond her eye.

Her voice is the song o' the morning,  
 That wakes thro' the green-spreading grove,  
 When Phœbus peeps over the mountains  
 On music, and pleasure, and love.

But beauty, how frail and how fleeting !  
 The bloom of a fine summer's day ;  
 While worth, in the mind o' my Phillis,  
 Will flourish without a decay.

In 'My Love is like a Red, Red Rose' he  
 uses exquisite symbolism :

My luve is like a red, red rose  
 That 's newly sprung in June ;  
 My luve is like a melodie  
 That 's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,  
 So deep in luve am I ;  
 And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
 'Till a' the seas gang dry.

In the pastoral song, 'Behold, my Love,  
 how Green the Groves,' he says in the last  
 verse :

These wild-wood flowers I 've pu'd to deck  
 That spotless breast o' thine ;  
 The courtier's gems may witness love,  
 But never love like mine.

In the dialogue song 'Philly and Willy,'

*He says,*

As songsters of the early spring  
 Are ilka day more sweet to hear,  
 So ilka day to me mair dear  
 And charming is my Philly.

each

*She replies,*

As on the brier the budding rose  
Still richer breathes and fairer blows,  
So in my tender bosom grows  
The love I bear my Willy.

In 'O Bonnie was yon Rosy Brier' he says :

O bonnie was yon rosy brier  
That blooms so far frae haunt o' man ;  
And bonnie she, and ah, how dear !  
It shaded frae the e'ning sun.

Yon rosebuds in the morning dew,  
How pure amang the leaves sae green ;  
But purer was the lover's vow  
They witnessed in their shade yestreen.

All in its rude and prickly bower,  
That crimson rose, how sweet and fair.  
But love is far a sweeter flower,  
Amid life's thorny path o' care.

In 'A Health to Ane I Loe Dear'—one of his most perfect love-songs—he says :

Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,  
And soft as their parting tear.

. . . . .

'Tis sweeter for thee despairing  
Than aught in the world beside.

In 'My Peggy's Charms,' describing Miss

Margaret Chalmers, Burns confines himself mainly to her mental and spiritual charms. This was clearly a distinctive characteristic of nearly the whole of his love-songs. No other man ever wrote so many pure songs without suggestion of the flesh as did Robert Burns.

My Peggy's face, my Peggy's form,  
The frost of hermit age might warm ;  
My Peggy's worth, my Peggy's mind,  
Might charm the first of human kind.

I love my Peggy's angel air,  
Her face so truly, heavenly fair.  
Her native grace, so void of art ;  
But I adore my Peggy's heart.

The tender thrill, the pitying tear,  
The generous purpose, nobly dear ;  
The gentle look that rage disarms—  
These are all immortal charms.

In his 'Epistle to Davie—A Brother Poet' Burns, after detailing the many hardships and sorrows of the poor, forgets the hardships, and recalls his blessings :

There 's a' the pleasures o' the heart,  
The lover and the frien' ;  
Ye hae your Meg, your dearest part,  
And I my darling Jean.



It warms me, it charms me,  
 To mention but her name ;  
 It heats me, it beets me,                      kindles  
 And sets me a' on flame.

O all ye powers who rule above !  
 O Thou whose very self art love !  
 Thou know'st my words sincere !  
 The life-blood streaming through my heart,  
 Or my more dear immortal part  
 Is not more fondly dear !  
 When heart-corroding care and grief  
 Deprive my soul of rest,  
 Her dear idea brings relief  
 And solace to my breast.  
 Thou Being, All-Seeing,  
 O hear my fervent prayer ;  
 Still take her, and make her  
 Thy most peculiar care.

Three years after the death of Highland Mary, Burns remained out in the stackyard on Ellisland farm and composed 'To Mary in Heaven.' Nothing could more strikingly prove the sincerity, the permanence, the purity, and the sacredness of the white-souled love of Burns than this poem :

Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,  
 That lov'st to greet the early morn,

Again thou usher'st in the day  
 My Mary from my soul was torn.  
 O Mary ! dear departed shade !  
 Where is thy place of blissful rest ?  
 See'st thou thy lover lowly laid ?  
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast ?

That sacred hour can I forget ?  
 Can I forget that hallow'd grove  
 Where, by the winding Ayr, we met  
 To live one day of parting love ?  
 Eternity can not efface  
 Those records dear of transports past ;  
 Thy image at our last embrace ;  
 Ah ! little thought we 'twas our last !

Ayr, gurgling, kiss'd his pebbled shore,  
 O'erhung with wild-woods, thickening green ;  
 The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar  
 Twined amorous round the raptured scene :  
 The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,  
 The birds sang love on every spray ;  
 Till too, too soon, the glowing west,  
 Proclaimed the speed of wingèd day.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,  
 And fondly broods with miser-care ;  
 Time but th' impression stronger makes,  
 As streams their channels deeper wear.  
 My Mary, dear departed shade !  
 Where is thy place of blissful rest ?  
 See'st thou thy lover lowly laid ?  
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast ?

The general themes of this sacred poem, written three years after Mary Campbell's death, are the preponderating themes of his love-songs. No love-songs ever written have so little of even embracing and kissing as the love-songs of Burns, except the sonnets of Mrs Browning.

It is worthy of note that Mary Campbell was not a beauty—her attractions were kindness, honesty, and unselfishness; yet, though happily married himself, he loved her, three years after her death, as profoundly as when they parted on the Faily, more than three years before he wrote the poem.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BURNS A PHILOSOPHER.

THE fine training by their father developed the minds of both Robert and Gilbert Burns as original, independent thinkers, chiefly in regard to religious, ethical, and social problems. Professor Dugald Stewart, of Edinburgh University, expressed the opinion that 'the mind of Burns was so strong and clear that he might have taken high rank as a thinker in any department of human thought; probably attaining as high rank in any other department as he achieved as a poet.' The quotations given from his writings in the preceding pages prove that he was a philosopher of unusual power in regard to Religion, Democracy, and Brotherhood.

Lockhart said, speaking of the ranking of Burns as a thinker, compared with the best trained minds in Edinburgh: 'Even the stateliest of these philosophers had enough to do to maintain the attitude of equality when brought into contact with Burns's gigantic understanding.'

Many of his poems are ornamented and increased in value by flashes of philosophic thought. His 'Epistle to a Young Friend' is a series of philosophical statements for human guidance.

Ye'll find mankind an unco squad,      strange  
And muckle they may grieve ye,      much

I'll no say men are villains a';  
The real hardened wicked,  
Wha hae nae check but human law,  
Are to a few restricket;      restricted

But, och! mankind are unco weak,      very  
An' little to be trusted;  
If self the wavering balance shake  
It's rarely right adjusted.

He takes a kindly view, that men as a whole are not so bad as pessimists would have us believe; that there are comparatively few that have no respect for the Divine Law, and are kept in check only by the fear of human law; but mourns because most men yet think more of self than of their neighbours, to whom they may be of service, and sees that, where our relations with our fellow-men are not satisfactorily balanced, the destroyer of harmony is universally selfishness in one form or another.

The fear o' Hell 's a hangman's whip  
To haud the wretch in order.

Even yet this is advanced philosophy, that fear, being a negative motive, cannot kindle human power or lead men to higher growth. So far as it can influence the human soul, its effect must be to depress it. Not only the fear of hell, but fear of anything, is an agency of evil. Some day a better word than fear will be used to express the proper attitude of human souls towards God.

But where you feel your honour grip  
Let that aye be your border.

What you think of yourself matters more to you than what others think of you. Let honour and conscience be your guide, and go not beyond the limits they prescribe. Stop at the slightest warning honour gives,

And resolutely keep its laws,  
Uncaring consequences.

In regard to religious matters, he gave his young friend sage advice :

The great Creator to revere  
Must sure become the creature ;  
But still the preaching cant forbear,  
And ev'n the rigid feature.

The soul's attitude to the Creator is a determining factor in deciding its happiness and growth. Reverence should not mean solemnity and awe. Reverence based on dread blights the soul and dwarfs it. True reverence reaches its highest when its source is joy; then it becomes productive of character—constructively transforming character. The formalism of 'preaching cant' robs religion of its natural attractiveness, especially to younger people; the 'rigid feature' turns those who would enjoy religion from association with those who claim to be Christians, and yet, especially when they speak about religion, look like melancholy and miserable criminals whose final appeal for pardon has been refused. Burns's philosophy would lift the shadows of frightfulness from religion and let its joyousness be revealed.

An Atheist's laugh 's a poor exchange  
For Deity offended.

A correspondence fixed wi' heaven  
Is sure a noble anchor.

To Burns, the relationship of the soul to God was of first importance. He cared little for man's formalisms, but personal connection with a loving Father he regarded as



the supreme source of happiness. Only a reverent and philosophic mind would think of prayer as 'a correspondence with heaven.'

Burns holds a high rank as a profound philosopher of human life, of human growth, and of human consciousness of the Divine, as the vital centre of human power.

Burns was a philosopher in his recognition that productive work is essential to human happiness and progress.

In 'The Twa Dogs' he makes Cæsar say :

But human bodies are sic fools,  
 For a' their colleges and schools,  
 That when nae real ills perplex them,  
 They mak enow themselves to vex them ;  
 An' ay the less they hae to sturt them,      trouble  
 In like proportion less will hurt them.

. . . . .

But gentleman, and ladies warst,  
 Wi' ev'n-down want o' wark are curst.

Burns had real sympathy for the idle rich. He saw that idleness leads to many evils, and that probably the worst evils, those that produce most unhappiness, are those that result from neglecting to use, or misusing, powers that, if wisely used, would produce comfort and happiness for ourselves as well as for others.

He believed that every man and woman would be happier if engaged in some productive occupation, and that those who do not use their hands to produce for themselves and their fellows are 'curst wi' want o' wark.'

This belief is based on an old and very profound philosophy, that is not even yet understood as widely and as fully as it should be: the philosophy first expounded by Plato, and afterwards by Goethe and Ruskin, that 'all evil springs from unused, or misused, good.' Whatever element is highest in our lives will degrade us most if misused. The best in the lives of the idle sours and causes deterioration instead of development of character, and breeds discontent and unhappiness, so that days are 'insipid, dull and tasteless,' and nights are 'unquiet, lang and restless.'

Burns showed that he understood this revealing philosophy in 'The Vision.' In this great poem he assumes that Coila, the genius of Kyle, his native district in Ayrshire, appeared to him in a vision, and revealed a clear understanding of the epoch events of his past life and their influence on his development, and gave him advice to guide him for the future. In one verse he says:

I saw thy pulse's maddening play  
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,  
Misled by fancy's meteor-ray,  
By passion driven ;  
But yet the light that led astray  
Was light from heaven.

He was attacked and criticised severely for the statement contained in the last two lines. The statement is but philosophic truth that his critics did not understand. Fancy and passion are elements of power given from heaven. Properly used they become important elements in human happiness and development. Improperly used they produce unhappiness and degradation.

Burns understood clearly the philosophic basis of modern education, the importance of developing the individuality, or selfhood, or special power of each child. The poem he wrote to his friend Robert Graham of Fintry, beginning :

When Nature her great masterpiece designed  
And framed her last, best work, the human mind,  
Her eye intent on all the mazy plan,  
She formed of various parts the various man,

is a philosophical description of how Nature produced various types of men, giving to each mind special powers and aptitudes.

The thought of the poem is the basis of all modern educational thought: the value of the individuality of each child, and the importance of developing it.

He expresses very beautifully the philosophy of the ephemeral nature of certain forms of pleasure in eight lines of 'Tam o' Shanter':

But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
 Or as the snowfall in the river,  
 A moment white, then melts forever;  
 Or like the borealis race,  
 That flit e'er you can point their place;  
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form,  
 Evanishing amid the storm.

Burns understood the philosophy of the simple life in the development of character and happiness.

In 'The Cotter's Saturday Night,' after dilating on the glories of simple, reverent religion, as compared with 'Religion's Pride,'

In all the pomp of method and of art,  
 When men display to congregations wide  
 Devotion's every grace except the heart,

he prays for the young people of Scotland—

Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil

Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content;  
 And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent

From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !

Then, how'er crowns and coronets be rent,  
A virtuous populace may rise the while,  
And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle.

He understood the value of simplicity in life as well as in religion, and expressed it in admirable form. -

'The Address to the Unco Guid' has a kindly philosophic sympathy running like a stream of light through it; the profound sympathy of the Master who searched for the one stray lamb, and who suggested that he who was without sin should cast the first stone. The last verse especially contains a sublime human philosophy, that if studied till understood, and then practised, would work a greatly needed change in the attitude of the rest of humanity towards the so-called wayward. It is one of the strange anomalies of life that, generally, professing Christian women have in the past been the last to come with Christian sympathy of an affectionate, and sisterly, and respectful quality to take an erring sister in their arms to try to prove that she still possessed their esteem, and to rekindle faith in her heart.

His poem to Mrs Dunlop on 'New Year's Day, 1790;' 'A Man's a Man for a' That;' 'A Winter Night;' 'Sketch in Verse;' and

‘Verses written in Friar’s Carse Hermitage,’ all show him to have been a philosophic student of human nature.

A few quotations from letters to his friends will show his philosophical attitude to general matters, as the quotations from his letters showed the clearness and trueness of his philosophy regarding religion, democracy, and brotherhood.

Burns saw man’s duty to his fellows and to himself in this life.

In a letter to Robert Ainslie, Edinburgh, 1788, he wrote: ‘I have no objection to prefer prodigality to avarice, in some few instances; but I appeal to your observation, if you have not met, and often met, with the same disingenuousness, the same hollow-hearted insincerity, and disintegrative depravity of principle, in the hackneyed victims of profusion, as in the unfeeling children of parsimony. I have every possible reverence for the much-talked-of world beyond the grave, and I wish that which piety believes, and virtue deserves, may be all matter of fact. But in all things belonging to, and terminating in, the present scene of existence, man has serious business on hand. Whether a man shall shake hands with welcome in the distinguished elevation of respect, or shrink from contempt in the abject corner of in-

significance; whether he shall wanton under the tropic of plenty, or at least enjoy himself in the comfortable latitudes of easy convenience, or starve in the arctic circle of poverty; whether he shall rise in the manly consciousness of a self-approving mind, or sink beneath a galling load of regret and remorse—these are alternatives of the last moment.’

Since the time of Burns men and women, both in the churches and out of them, have learned to set more store on the importance of living truly on the earth, and have ceased to a large extent to think only of a life to come after death. Men and women are now trying in increasing numbers to make it more heavenly here.

Burns taught a sound philosophy of contentment as a basis for happiness.

He wrote to Mr Ainslie in 1789: ‘You need not doubt that I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business [that of a gauger], but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint at the evils of life. Human existence in the most favourable situations does not abound with pleasures, and has its inconveniences and ills; capricious, foolish man mistakes these inconveniences and ills, as if they were the peculiar property of his own



particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness, that love of change, which has ruined, and daily does ruin, many a fine fellow, as well as many a blockhead; and is almost without exception a constant source of disappointment and misery. So far from being dissatisfied with my present lot, I earnestly pray the Great Disposer of events that it may never be worse, and I think I can lay my hand on my heart and say "I shall be content."

Good, sound philosophy of contentment! Not the contentment that does not try to improve life's conditions, but the wise contentment that recognises the best in present conditions, instead of foolishly resenting what it cannot change.

Burns taught the philosophy of good citizenship.

In 1789 he wrote to Mr Ainslie: 'If the relations we stand in to King, country, kindred, and friends be anything but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity, and justice be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female whose tender, faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be

the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his King, and the support, nay the very vital existence, of his country in the ensuing age, is the type of truest manhood.'

This quotation from a letter written to a warm, personal friend from whom he was not seeking any favours gives an insight into a rational mind loyal to God, loyal to his king, loyal to his country, and lovingly loyal to his wife and family.

In a letter to the Right Rev. Dr Geddes, a Roman Catholic Bishop resident in Edinburgh, a very kind friend to Burns, he wrote, 1789: 'I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare. It gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here at last [at Ellisland], stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination to attend to those great and important questions: What I am? Where I am? For what I am destined? Thus with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten; I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I am determined to study Man and Nature, and in that view, incessantly

to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.'

Bishop Gillis, a Roman Catholic Bishop who lived more than sixty years after the death of Burns, said, in reference to the letter from which this quotation was made: 'If any man, after perusing this letter, will still say that the mind of Burns was beyond the reach of religious influence, or, in other words, that he was a scoffer at revelation, that man need not be reasoned with, as his own mind must be hopelessly beyond the reach of argument.'

In a letter to his friend Cunningham he wrote, 1789: 'What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness, and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness, and misery, it is surely worthy of inquiry whether there be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients be not applicable to enjoyment, and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness and intoxication in bliss which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence.

'There is not a doubt but that health,

talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends, are real, substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many, or all, of these good things, and *notwithstanding* contrive to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen? I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life—not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of viewing an extended landscape, but rather for the dishonest pride of looking down on others of our fellow-creatures, seemingly diminutive in other stations, &c.’

His philosophy clearly recognised the evils of unduly centring our minds and hearts on pleasure, and thus not only robbing ourselves of development, and humanity of the advantage of the many things we might do in our overtime devoted to pleasure, but destroying our interest in the things that were intended to give us happiness.

He also recognised fully the evils of selfish ambition which aims at attaining higher positions than others; which climbs, not to get into purer air to see more widely our true relationships to our fellow-men, but for the degrading satisfaction of being able to look

down with a hardening pride that separates humanity into groups instead of uniting all men in brotherhood. A man whose heart and mind are engrossed by base material aims cannot grow truly, and he loses the advantages that should have come to him from the elements of blessing he possesses by misusing them for selfish ends.

In another letter he wrote: 'All my fears and cares are of this world; if there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a Deist; but, I fear, every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man, but, like electricity, phlogiston, &c., the subject is so involved in darkness that we want data to go upon.'

His philosophy left him no fears for what comes after death. He had deep faith in the justice of God. 'I believe,' he said, 'that God perfectly understands the being He has made.' Believing this, and believing also that God is just, he feared not the future. Burns, as he said to Mrs Dunlop, was 'in his idle moments sometimes a little sceptical.' But they were only moments. He knew there were problems he could not solve, and so, as he wrote

to Dr Candlish, 'he was glad to grasp revealed religion.' A thoughtful man requires more faith in revealed religion than a man who does not really think, but only thinks he is thinking, when other people's thoughts are running through his head. Burns needed strong faith, and he had it even about religious matters he could not explain. 'The necessities of my own heart,' as he wrote to Mrs Dunlop, 'gave the lie to my cold philosophisings.' His 'Ode to Mrs Dunlop on New Year's Day, 1790,' said :

The voice of Nature loudly cries,  
And many a message from the skies,  
That something in us never dies.

He accepted by faith the 'messages from the skies,' and in his soul harmonised the messages with the 'Voice of Nature,' even though his philosophic mind searched for proof of problems he could not solve.

In a letter to Peter Hill, 1790, he wrote : 'Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that avarice for the good things we chance to have is born with us ; but we are placed here among so much nakedness and hunger and poverty and want, that we are under a damning necessity of studying self-



ishness in order that we may EXIST. Still there are in every age a few souls that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase into selfishness, or even give the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for, but if I could (and I believe I do, as far as I can), I would 'wipe away all tears from all eyes.'

Burns was not self-righteous. He moralises in this quotation not as one of the 'unco guid,' but as a man on what he thought was one of life's most perplexing problems, poverty. He saw the problem more keenly than most men see it yet. It was not the poverty of Burns himself that, as Carlyle believed, made him write and work for freedom and justice for the labouring-classes. It is quite true, however, that one of his reasons for pleading for democracy was the poverty among the peasantry of his time. He saw the injustice of conditions, and admitted in his poem to Davie, a brother poet, that

It's hardly in a body's power  
To keep at times from being sour,  
To see how things are shared.



Burns recommended the philosophy of right, not expediency in public as well as private matters.

He wrote a letter to Mrs Dunlop in 1790, in which he said : ‘ I believe, in my conscience, such ideas as, “ my country ; her independence ; her honour ; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land,” &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world* ; men who, in fact, guide, for the most part, and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They knew the use of bawling out such terms to rouse or lead the Rabble ; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper ; and their measure of conduct is not what they ought, but *what they dare*. For the truth of this, I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men, and himself one of the ablest men that ever lived—the celebrated Earl of Chesterfield. In fact a man that could thoroughly control his vices, whenever they interfered with his interest, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, *the perfect man*, a

man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly not the staunch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honour, virtue, and worth to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, then the true measure of human conduct is *proper and improper*; virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the same import and value to the world at large as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstasy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings and inharmonic jars in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society, as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart. . . .

‘Mackenzie has been called “the Addison of the Scots,” and, in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison’s exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and

the pathetic. His *Man of Feeling*—but I am not counsel-learned in the laws of criticism—I estimate as the first performance of the kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence—in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others, than from the simple, affecting tale of poor Harley?

‘Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie’s writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do you not think, Madam, that among the few favoured of heaven in the structure of their minds (for such there certainly are) there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, and elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree absolutely disqualifying, for the truly important business of making a man’s way into life?’

Burns understood the underlying philosophy of sensitiveness.

In a letter to Miss Craik, 1790, he wrote: ‘There is not among the martyrologies ever penned so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the comparative view of

wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man ; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of wanton butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase ; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet. To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the Muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poesy is like bewitching woman : she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the counsels of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding

them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet, where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worth the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisaical bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures that we owe to the lovely Queen of the heart of Man!

He based the last two lines in his 'Poem on Sensibility' on this philosophy:

Chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure,  
Thrill the deepest notes of woe.

His 'Parting Song to Clarinda' reveals in the four lines, said by Sir Walter Scott 'to contain the essence of a thousand love-tales,' how deepest love may bring darkest sorrow:

Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

In a letter to Crawford Tait, Esq., Edinburgh, 1790, requesting a sympathetic interest on behalf of a young man from Ayrshire, he says: 'I shall give you my friend's character in two words: as to his head, he has talents

enough, and more than enough, for common life ; as to his heart, when Nature had kneaded the kindly clay that composes it, she said, “ I can no more.”

‘ You, my good Sir, were born under kinder stars ; but your fraternal sympathy, I well know, can enter into the feelings of the young man who goes into life with the laudable ambition to *do* something, and to *be* something among his fellow-creatures ; but whom the consciousness of friendless obscurity presses to the earth, and wounds to the soul !

‘ Even the fairest of his virtues are against him. That independent spirit, and that ingenuous modesty—qualities inseparable from a noble mind—are, with the million, circumstances not a little disqualifying. What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and the happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of such depressed youth ! I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse—the goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened—but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow-creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment ? We wrap ourselves up in the cloak of our better-fortune and turn away our eyes, lest the wants and woes



of our brother-mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls.'

Burns was a deep character student, and he was able to adjust the balance fairly when weighing the characteristics that count for success in public life, in business, and in private life. He always recommended honesty, and always admired that independent spirit and that ingenuous modesty inseparable from a noble mind. Much as he admired them, however, he clearly understood that these admirable qualities might prevent the perfect development of a soul if they made a man morbidly sensitive, or interfered in any way with his faith in himself.

Speaking of 'independence and sensibility,' the same qualities he discussed in the letter quoted (to Mr Crawford Tait), he says in a letter to Peter Hill, Edinburgh, 1791, addressing poverty: 'By thee the man of sentiment, whose heart flows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect or writhes in bitterness of soul under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth.'

Burns taught the just philosophy of gratitude to God.

In a letter to Dr Moore, of London, he wrote, 1791: 'Whatsoever is not detrimental



to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the Giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by His creatures with thankful delight.'

We cannot yet estimate the philosophic vision of Burns. It will grow clearer as century follows century. Carlyle said of him: 'We see that in this man was the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force, and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him, and a consuming fire, as lightning lurks in the drop of the summer clouds.'

So much for his heart; what says Carlyle about his mind?

'Burns never studied philosophy. . . . Nevertheless, sufficient indication, if no proof sufficient, remains for us in his works; we discern the brawny movements of a gigantic though untutored strength; and can understand how, in conversation, his quick, sure insight into men and things may, as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

'But, unless we mistake, the intellectual gift of Burns is fine as well as strong. The more delicate relations of things could not well have escaped his eye, for they were intimately present to his heart. The logic of the senate

and the forum is indispensable, but not all-sufficient; nay, perhaps the highest truth is that which will most certainly elude it, for this logic works by words, and "the highest," it has been said, "cannot be expressed in words." We are not without tokens of an openness for this higher truth also, a keen though uncultivated sense for it having existed in Burns. Mr Stewart, it will be remembered, wondered that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the doctrine of Association. We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of Association had from of old been familiar to him.'

Carlyle's last statement is correct. He admits the great essential truth that Burns was a subtle philosopher. What a pity that such a man as Carlyle should have thought it necessary to say that Burns 'never studied philosophy.' The statement is incorrect, but, if it had been correct, why make it? and why call his mental strength 'untutored,' and his 'keen sense of the highest philosophy' 'uncultivated'?

Did any other philosopher of the time of Burns in the universities reveal a more profound philosophy of human life, and make so many applications of it, as Robert Burns revealed in the quotations in this chapter, and

in the chapters on Democracy, Brotherhood, and Love?

Burns was a philosopher, an independent thinker, whose thought is more highly appreciated now than it was in the time of Carlyle.

In a letter to Mrs Graham, 1791, he wrote: 'I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor. But I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter that shall ever make me do anything injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings—for failings are a part of human nature—may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind.'

Speaking of the moral character of Burns, Carlyle is wise and just. He says: 'We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay, from doubting that he is less guilty than one of ten thousand tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the Plebiscite of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust

in its judgments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance; it decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively, but negatively, less on what is done right than on what is or is not done wrong. . . . What Burns did under his circumstances, and what he forbore to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.'

Burns was naturally a student gifted with a great mind. His splendid mind was trained to act logically by his remarkable father, and quickened and illuminated by his great teacher John Murdoch. He was a great philosopher, not merely because he read Locke's 'Essay on the Human Understanding' when a boy, but because during his short life he read with joyous interest many books of a philosophical character, and what is of infinitely greater importance, he interpreted all he read with an independent mind, and related all truth as he understood it to human life. He could discuss even the principles of Spinoza, and 'venture into the daring path Spinoza trod.' Yet, as he told Dr Candlish, of Edinburgh, he merely 'ventured in' to test Spinoza's philosophy, which he soon found to be inadequate to the true development of the human soul, and there-

fore he 'was glad to grasp revealed religion.' Not merely as a great poetic genius, but as a profound philosophic teacher of religion, democracy, and brotherhood—the most essentially vital elements related to the highest development of the souls of men and women—will the real Robert Burns become known as he is more justly and more deeply studied.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF BURNS.

BORN 1759—DIED 1796.

#### *6 Years Old.*

AT six years of age he was sent to a school in a little home near Alloway Mill for a few months. Then the school was closed, and William Burns, his father, and a few neighbours engaged a remarkably fine teacher named John Murdoch to teach their children.

#### *7 Years Old.*

When Burns was seven years old his father moved to Mount Oliphant farm, about two miles from Alloway. Robert continued to attend Murdoch's school.

#### *8 Years Old.*

He continued to attend Murdoch's school.

#### *9 Years Old.*

Murdoch, his beloved teacher, left Alloway. He had not only been the teacher of Burns,

but had lent the boy books, among them being *The Life of Hannibal*. Burns said this book 'was the earliest I recollect taking any pleasure in.' Murdoch presented him with an English grammar and a book translated from the French, named *The School for Love*. His imagination during this period was kindled by many legends, ghost stories, tales, and songs told and sung by an old lady, Betty Davidson, who lived in the family home.

### 10 Years Old.

Read and studied with his father, discussing freely the merits of the books read.

### 11 Years Old.

He studied, and continued to study with enthusiasm, English grammar, and had become an unusually excellent scholar for his age in English. His father regularly taught his family after Murdoch left Alloway. A deep and lasting impression was made on Robert's mind during this year by a *Collection of Letters*, written by the leading authors of Queen Anne's reign.

### 12 Years Old.

Worked on the farm, and read with his father at night. Wrote many letters to imaginary correspondents.



*13 Years Old.*

He was sent for a few weeks to a school in Dalrymple to learn penmanship. John Murdoch was appointed teacher in the High School at Ayr. He became again a visitor to the Burns' home, in which he was a most welcome guest. He presented Pope's works to Robert. During this year Burns continued an imaginary correspondence with many people, and began to form a style moulded by the Letters of the great prose-writers of Queen Anne's time.

*14 Years Old.*

Boarded with Murdoch in Ayr for a few weeks, to devote himself to a deeper study of English. Studied French a little, and gave a little attention to Latin. The best influence of his brief period with Murdoch was the kindling of his vision with higher ideals of life, his relationship to his fellow-men, and his duty to God.

*15 Years Old.*

Began to take his place as an independent thinker with men, and surprised them by his wide knowledge and his unusual powers of expression and impression. Took his share in

reaping the grain on the farm, and fell in love with his harvest mate, Nellie Kirkpatrick, who bound and shocked, or stooked, what he reaped. She was a good-looking girl of fourteen, who sang well. Burns said her love made him a poet. He composed his first poem, 'Handsome Nell,' as a tribute to her. His love for her undoubtedly kindled him at the centre of his power, as a true love that is respectfully treated by parents always does for a youth during the adolescent period.

### 16 Years Old.

He laboured hard on the farm, but was worried by his father's poverty, by the poor-ness of the soil of Mount Oliphant farm, and especially by the harsh and over-bearing manner in which his father was treated by the landlord's agent. Hard labour and possibly insufficient nourishment for a youth growing rapidly, coupled with his humiliation at the conduct of the agent, and his sorrowful sympathy, affected his health. He became depressed and moody, and suffered from headaches and palpitation of the heart. He had become acquainted with a few respectable women in Ayr, one of whom lent him the *Spectator* and Pope's *Homer*. These he read

and digested with a growing interest, and used with rapidly developing power.

*17 Years Old.*

Was sent to the school of Hugh Rodger at Kirkoswald to learn mathematics, especially mensuration and surveying. He enjoyed the work and made rapid progress. He formed a friendship with William Niven, who went to the same school; and in order to develop his powers as an independent thinker and a public speaker, he and Willie organised a debating society of two, which met in formal debate once a week. This developed his intellectual powers more than the study of mathematics. His school-days in Kirkoswald came to a sudden ending when he met Peggy Thomson, who lived next to the school. His second adolescent love came unexpectedly, and with great force. He says Peggy Thomson's charms 'Overset his trigonometry, and set him off at a tangent from his studies.' He tried to study, but at the end of the week gave it all up and went home.

His schoolmaster learned about the debates between him and Willie Niven, and determined to put an end to such waste of time from the study of mathematics. He charged Niven one day with the crime of debating, and

demanded the subject for the next debate. Willie told him the subject for to-morrow was, 'Resolved that a great general is of more use to the world than a good merchant.' 'Nonsense,' thundered the teacher; 'everybody ought to know that a general is of far more importance to the world than a merchant.' Burns promptly said to the teacher, 'You take the general's side, and I will take the merchant's side, and let us see.'

Burns spoke with such wide information, such fine reasoning and such splendid eloquence, that he soon had the boys cheering him wildly. This annoyed the master, and he became so angry that he dismissed the school for the day.

Even at the early age of seventeen he had few rivals as a public speaker and debater. He took lessons in a dancing-school at Tarbolton, when he returned from Kirkoswald, to improve his social manners. During this year he read Thomson's works, Shenstone's works, a *Select Collection of English Songs*, Allan Ramsay's works, Hervey's *Meditations*, and some of Shakespeare's plays.

### 18 Years Old.

The family moved to Lochlea farm, about four miles from Mauchline. Up to this

time he had been an awkward and bashful youth. He began now to be more at ease with the opposite sex after he had been introduced to them. He had no real lover, however, between 17 and 21.

### *19 Years Old.*

About this time he made a plan for a tragedy. He never finished it, and preserved only a fragment, beginning, 'All devil as I am.'

### *20 Years Old.*

A year of work, reading, and visions that were but the bases of higher visions yet to come.

### *21 Years Old.*

He, with his brother Gilbert and five other young men, founded a debating club in an upstairs room of a private house in Tarbolton. He read persistently; held a book in his left hand at meals; and usually carried a book with him while walking. About this time he began to be known as a critic of the preaching and practices of the 'Auld Licht' preachers, and enjoyed shocking those who were, in his judgment, not vital, but only professing, Christians, who did nothing to prove the genuineness of their religion. In this year

his heart was kindled by the first love of his manhood.

### 22 Years Old.

He read Sterne's works, Macpherson's *Ossian*, and Mackenzie's *The Man of the World* and *Man of Feeling*. He said 'he valued the last book more than any other book, except the Bible.' His mind turned to religious subjects very definitely at this period. He developed a deep and reverent affection for Alison Begbie, who was a servant on a farm not far from Lochlea farm. The farm was on Cessnock Water. He wrote three poems to her: 'The Lass of Cessnock Banks,' 'Peggy Alison,' and 'Mary Morrison.' His letters to her reveal the two great dominant elements in his mind and heart at that time: a deep and respectful love, and some of the highest ideals of vital religion.

In this year love again stirred him to write poetry. He said it became 'a darling walk for his mind.' 'Winter—a Dirge' belongs to this period.

### 23 Years Old.

This was an eventful year. Alison Begbie had declined his offer of marriage. Had she married him and lived he would have had but one love after maturity. He ventured into

business in Irvine. He says his partner 'was a scoundrel of the first water, who made money by the mystery of thieving.' Their shop was burned, and he found himself not worth a sixpence. He read two novels, *Pamela*, and *Ferdinand, Count Fathom*, and *Fergusson's Poems*, which filled him with a deeper determination to write poetry. He wrote several religious poems this year.

### 24 Years Old.

He became a Freemason in Tarbolton, and devoted a good deal of time to the order. He did not write much poetry. His mind was occupied by religious matters, and he had an impression that his life was not going to last very long. This idea haunted him for two or three years after his maturity. He contemplated death as a rest, but he continued to store his mind and think independently. Dr Mackenzie, who attended his father on his death-bed towards the end of the year, wrote, 'that on his first visit he found Gilbert and his father friendly and cordial, but Robert silent and uncompanionable, till he began discussing a medical subject, when Robert promptly joined in the discussion, and showed an unexpected and remarkable un-



derstanding of the subject.' During this year he wrote 'My Father was a Farmer' and 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie.'

### *25 Years Old.*

His father died in February, leaving the family very poor. Robert and Gilbert rented Mossgiel farm, about two miles from Mauchline, and the family moved there. Robert determined to be a scientific farmer. He read the best books he could get on agriculture; but bad seed, bad weather, and late harvest left the brothers only half an average crop. He continued to work on the farm, but evidently began to realise more clearly the kindling call to poetry as the special work of his life. During the next twelve years he produced a continuous out-pouring of wonderful poems, although about half of the twelve years he worked as a farmer on Mossgiel and Ellisland farms, and most of the rest of the time worked hard as a gauger, riding two hundred miles each week in the performance of his duties. In this year he wrote 'The Rigs of Barley,' composed in August; 'My Nannie O,' 'Green Grow the Rashes,' 'Man was Made to Mourn,' 'The Twa Herds,' and the 'Epitaph on My Ever Honoured Father.' In

this year he met Jean Armour, and soon loved her.

### *26 Years Old.*

He wrote many poems during this year, the most important being 'Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet,' 'Holy Willie's Prayer,' 'Death and Doctor Hornbook,' three long 'Epistles to John Lapraik,' 'Epistle to William Simpson,' 'Epistle to John Goldie,' 'Rantin', Rovin' Robin,' 'Epistle to Rev. John M'Math,' 'Second Epistle to Davie,' 'Farewell to Ballochmyle,' 'Hallowe'en,' 'To a Mouse,' 'The Jolly Beggars,' 'The Cotter's Saturday Night,' 'Address to the Deil,' and 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie.'

### *27 Years Old.*

This was an eventful and productive year for Burns. Quickly following each other came 'The Twa Dogs,' 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer,' 'The Ordination,' 'Epistle to James Smith,' 'The Vision,' 'Address to the Unco Guid,' 'The Holy Fair,' 'To a Mountain Daisy,' 'To Ruin,' 'Despondency: an Ode,' 'Epistle to a Young Friend,' 'Nature's Law,' 'The Brigs of Ayr,'

‘O Thou Dread Power!’ ‘Farewell Song to the Banks of Ayr,’ ‘Lines on Meeting Lord Daer,’ ‘Masonic Song,’ ‘Tam Samson’s Elegy,’ ‘A Winter Night,’ ‘Yon Wild Mossy Mountains,’ ‘Address to Edinburgh,’ and ‘Address to a Haggis,’ with love-songs and many minor pieces.

Burns had given Jean Armour a certificate of marriage, and he nearly lost his mental balance when, at her father’s order, she consented to have it burned. Fortunately for him two things aided in preserving his balance: the publication of the Kilmarnock edition of his poems, and his love for Mary Campbell, ‘Highland Mary.’ No man ever needed a love, deep and true, to save him more than Burns did. He believed Jean was lost to him for ever. He was not a faithless but a needy lover when he found a responsive heart in Highland Mary. They made their marriage vows on the Fail, Sunday, 14th May 1786. Mary went home to prepare for marriage, but caught a fever and died. Burns went to Edinburgh later in the year to publish a second edition of his poems, as the first edition had been so well received. In Edinburgh he was the hero of the highest and most thoroughly educated classes. He wrote several fine poems to Mary Campbell.

*28 Years Old.*

Three thousand copies of his poems were published in April in Edinburgh, netting him over five hundred pounds. He made two triumphal tours—the Border Tour and the Highland Tour. As Mary Campbell was dead, his love was kindled by Clarinda, Mrs M'Lehose, with whom he conducted an intensive love correspondence, and to whom he wrote several beautiful love-songs. As she was a married woman who was separated from her husband, Burns could not marry her. In this year he wrote the 'Inscription for the Headstone of Fergusson,' 'Epistle to Mrs Scott,' 'The Bonnie Moor Hen,' 'On the Death of John M'Leod,' 'Elegy on the Death of James Hunter Blair,' 'The Humble Petition of Bruar Water,' 'Lines on the Fall of Fyers,' 'Castle Gordon,' 'On Scaring Some Waterfowl,' 'A Rosebud by My Early Walk,' 'The Banks of Devon,' 'The Young Highland Rover,' 'Birthday Ode,' and many short pieces and love-songs, among them 'The Birks of Aberfeldy.'

*29 Years Old.*

Rented Ellisland farm, on the Nith, near Dumfries. Married Jean Armour (second marriage to her) in April, and left her in

Mauchline till he could build a home for her on Ellisland, which was ready in December. Building his new home, stocking and managing the farm, and riding fifty miles occasionally to his Jean, made his year so busy that he wrote little poetry, but exquisite love-songs. The estate of Glenriddell, owned in the time of Burns by Robert Riddell, bordered on Ellisland farm. Robert Riddell was a fine type of Scottish gentleman, and Burns and he became warm friends. Among the best poems of this year, not love-songs, are 'Verses written in Friar's Carse Hermitage,' 'Epistle to Robert Graham of Fintry,' 'The Day Returns,' 'A Mother's Lament,' 'The Fall of the Leaf,' 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'The Poet's Progress,' 'Elegy on the Year 1788,' and 'Epistle to James Tennant.'

### *30 Years Old.*

Wrote many love-songs for Johnson's Scots Musical Museum, though busily engaged in farming, and, in addition, a new Psalm for the Chapel of Kilmarnock; a sketch in verse to Right Hon. C. J. Fox, 'The Wounded Hare,' 'The Banks of Nith,' 'John Anderson my Joe,' 'The Kirk of Scotland's Alarm,' 'Caledonia,' 'The Battle of Sherramuir,' 'The Braes

o' Killiecrankie,' 'Farewell to the Highlands,' 'To Mary in Heaven,' 'Epistle to Dr Blacklock,' and 'New Year's Day, 1790.'

### *31 Years Old.*

Found his farm 'a ruinous affair.' Accepted a position as an exciseman at fifty pounds a year. Had to ride two hundred miles each week. Continued writing love-songs for Johnson's Museum (without pay), and wrote in addition, 'Tam o' Shanter,' 'Lament of Mary Queen of Scots,' and 'The Banks of Doon.'

### *32 Years Old.*

Continued to write love-songs, among the most beautiful being 'Sweet Afton' and 'Parting Song to Clarinda.' In addition, wrote 'Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn,' 'On Glenriddell's Fox Breaking his Chain,' 'Poem on Pastoral Poetry,' 'Verses on the Destruction of the Woods near Drumlanrig,' 'Second Epistle to Robert Graham of Fintry,' 'The Song of Death,' and 'Poem on Sensibility.'

### *33 Years Old.*

Wrote many love-songs, among them 'The



Lea Rig' and 'Highland Mary.' His other poems were mainly election ballads. His love-songs were now written mainly for Thomson's *National Songs and Melodies*. He still refused pay for his songs.

### 34 Years Old.

Still, notwithstanding his very busy life, he sent a continuous stream of songs to Edinburgh. Other poems of the year were 'Sonnet Written on the Author's Birthday,' 'Lord Gregory,' and 'Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled.' In this year he moved to the house in which he died, and in which Jean died thirty-eight years afterwards.

### 35 Years Old.

In this year Burns, to supplement 'Scots, wha hae' (the greatest bugle-song of freedom), wrote two grand poems on Liberty: 'The Ode to Liberty' and 'The Tree of Liberty;' and 'Contented Wi' Little and Cantie Wi' Mair.' In this year he declined an offer from the London *Morning Chronicle* to become a regular contributor to that paper.

### 36 Years Old.

Love-songs, and election ballads in favour



of his friend Mr Heron, were his most numerous poems this year. In addition to other minor pieces he wrote a fine poem to his friend, Alexander Cunningham, 'Does Haughty Gaul Invasion Threat,' and the most triumphant combined interpretation of democracy and brotherhood ever written, 'A Man's a Man for a' That.'

### *37 Years Old.*

Early in the year his health gave way, and he died, 21st July 1796. Though apparently a strong man, it is reasonable to believe that he had a constitutional tendency towards consumption. His father died from this dread disease, and his grandmother (his mother's mother) died at thirty-five from the same cause. Burns inherited his physical and intellectual powers mainly from his mother. Both by heredity and contagion, therefore, he was made susceptible to influences that develop consumption. He continued to write poetry, chiefly love-songs, during his illness. His last poem was written, nine days before his death, to Miss Margaret Chalmers, for whom he had a reverent affection.

No reference has been made in this sketch of his development to the prose written each

year. Five hundred and thirty-four of his letters have been published. They are written in a stately style, and most of them contain philosophic discussions of religion, ethics, or democracy.

A shy, sensitive, retiring boy; a deep-thinking, persistently studying, eloquent, still shy youth; a brilliant reasoner, a thinker ranking with leaders in his neighbourhood, meeting each on equal terms, and easily proving his superiority by his remarkable knowledge of each man's special subject of study, and by his still more remarkable powers of independent thinking and clear revelation of his thought in his young manhood, but still at twenty-two too shy to propose to the first lover of his maturity; always a reverent lover of Nature, whose mind saw God in beauty, in dawn-gleam and eve-glow, in tree and flower, in river and mountain; he studied, thought, and expressed his thoughts in exquisite poetry, and, according to those who knew him best, in still richer and more captivating conversation, until at twenty-seven he stood in the midst of the most learned professors of Scotland and outclassed them all. No single professor of the galaxy of culture in which he stood, modest and dignified, could have spoken so wisely, so profoundly, so easily,

and with such graceful manner and charming eloquence on *so many subjects* as did Burns.

It is a marvel that grows greater the more we try to understand it, that a boy who left school when he was nine years old, and, except for a few weeks, did not go to school again; and who, from nine years of age to his thirty-second year, was a steady farm-worker, with the exception of a brief interval during which he was engaged publishing his poems; and was a gauger from thirty-two to thirty-six, should have been able to write so much immortal poetry and so much instructive prose in such a short time.

One of the most interesting of all the pictures of the lives of the world's literary leaders is the picture of Robert Burns, after a day of toil on the farm, walking from Mossgiel farm, when his evening meal was over, two miles to his favourite seat in the woods on Ballochmyle estate, and sitting there on the high bank of the Ayr in the long Scottish gloaming, and often on in the moonlight, 'shut in with God,' revealing in sublime form the visions that thrilled his soul. During the last few years of his life he walked from his home to Lincluden Abbey ruins on his favourite path beside the winding Nith to spend his gloaming

hours alone, and composed there some of his masterpieces.

Short was his life, but he lives on in the hearts of succeeding generations. He lives on, too, in his permanent influence on religion, freedom, and brotherhood.

THE END.





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Robert Burns



